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25 July 2002
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PRIVATE EYE

NEW OSAMA THREAT TO AMERICA

Gnome

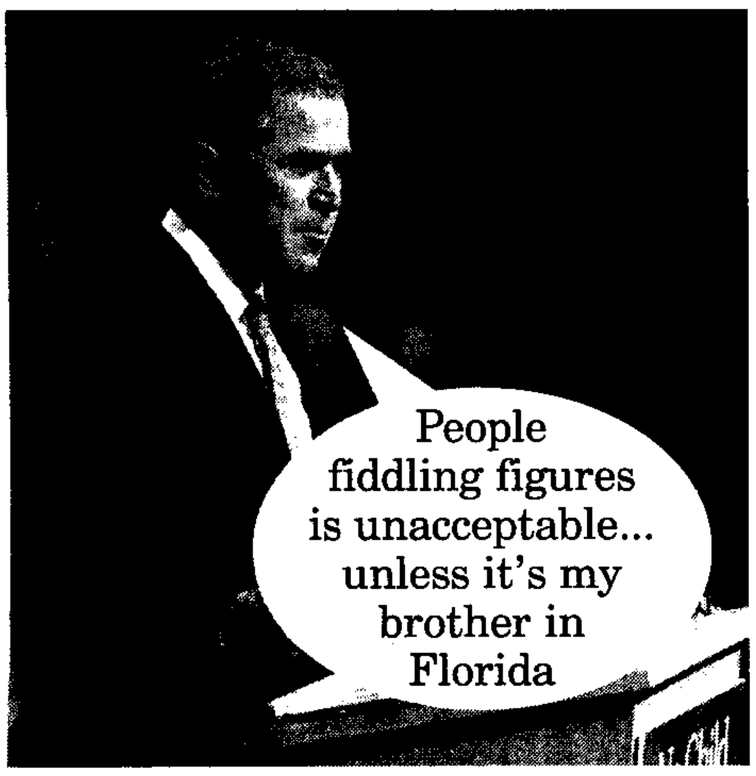
THERE has been a great deal of unnecessary panic following the stories of corporate fraud in the United States.

Thanks to the tighter regulatory systems in place in this country, not to mention the old-fashioned integrity of the City of London where a man's word is his bond, such criminality could not happen here.

Rather than suffer from the American experience, British institutions will profit as more and more investors seek a safe haven for their hard-earned savings in Britain's decent, well-ordered markets.

Lord Gnome
Prisoner 3742387
D Block, Maxwell Wing
Fraud Open Prison

BUSH DECLARES WAR ON FRAUD



President Bust has announced plans to expand home ownership among minorities and to build more affordable housing in the US — *Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors website*

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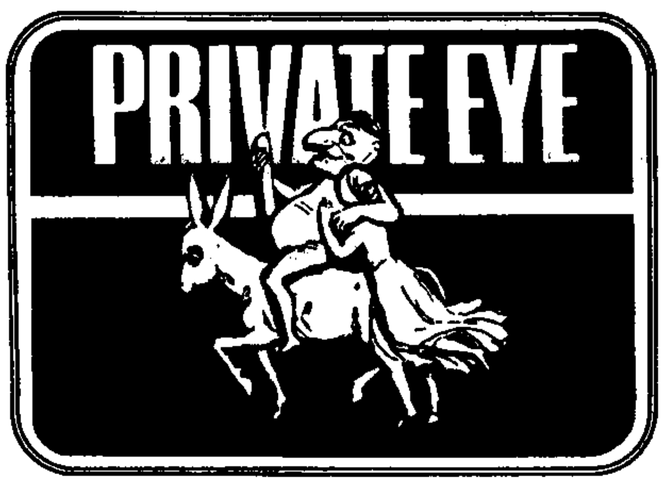

Stars and gripes!

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AFTER the WorldCom fraud Peter Wyman, president of the Institute of Chartered Accountants and senior tax partner at PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), was quick to reassure British audiences that it could not happen here. But how would he know? He's a tax expert, not an auditor; and it already *has* happened here with clients of his own firm.

Remember BCCI, Maxwell, Barings and, more recently, Allied Irish Bank? But then the last thing PwC and the remaining post-Andersen Big Three accountancy firms want are reforms, such as auditor rotation, which will remove the opportunity to make up for the losses they make auditing by selling big ticket services like tax advice.

As to whether there is another WorldCom, Qwest or Enron waiting to implode in Britain, investors should be aware that many British companies have indeed been taking liberties with the possibilities offered by acquisition accounting, vendor finance, pension profits, depreciation, lease finance and research made available by the inexact science of auditing that have been used and abused in the US.

Nor is there a shortage of "black box" companies on this side of the Atlantic whose accounts have been labelled impenetrable by analysts. The Irish drug company Elan, BAE Systems and Cable & Wireless come to mind. Elan has already had to make serious recalculations of its figures under pressure from the Securities & Exchange Commission. And an end to aggressive accounting could bring changes too at BAE Systems and C&W. The latter has already admitted similar capacity swaps to those used by WorldCom, Global Crossing and Qwest to inflate revenues.

Elan and others all claim they have not done what Enron and its imitators did – ultimately including fraud. But whether their and other companies' figures stand up to post-Enron examination remains to be seen.

AS telecom giant WorldCom goes bust in a £2.7bn corporate fraud, will Labour change its attitude to the company?

In February 2001 treasury minister Melanie Johnson announced her delight that WorldCom executive Lucy Woods had agreed to take charge of Britain's money supply. Woods, European and Middle Eastern vice-president of WorldCom, became a director of the Royal Mint, the aim being to "broaden the commercial expertise on the Mint's board, and the organisation's ability to develop new commercial freedoms".

Whether the Mint now begins to invent billions of dollars of earnings and adopt highly aggressive accounting practices remains to be seen. What is certain is that under Woods' leadership both the Mint and WorldCom are making redundancies.

With immaculate timing – just days before the WorldCom fraud was exposed at the end of June – another British politician called on Woods for help. David Trimble put her on a panel of experts to review public administration in Northern Ireland and "take a fundamental look at the way we run our public services and how they are delivered to our citizens".

Previously Labour had cosied up to Woods and WorldCom when WorldCom won a £50m contract from the Higher Education Funding Council to supply "SuperJanet", the replacement for Janet, which is an electronic network connecting Britain's universities. Unable to resist the high-tech photo opportunity, the then technology and learning minister Michael Wills stood by Woods at the signing ceremony and said the contract would bring "immeasurable" benefits.

MEANWHILE, a cloud hangs over three of "new" Labour's favourite big businesses.

The problems at Vivendi in Paris will have repercussions for the British companies (and contracts) Vivendi snapped up so greedily. It runs at least three water companies here, not to mention the waste manager Onyx and the not entirely popular rail company, Connex.

Jarvis plc is causing even greater headaches for the government. Transport secretary Alistair Darling was noticeably embarrassed when pressed by Jeremy Vine on *Newsnight* about Jarvis's responsibility for the Potters Bar rail disaster. Darling knows only too well that Jarvis has been sucking up to Labour ever since it was elected. It sponsored a grand conference dinner at the 1999 Labour party conference, and in the same year it hired Labour peer Lord Hogg as a consultant.

As the contracts, especially for private finance initiative (PFI) projects, flooded in, Jarvis's fortunes rose and its chief executive Paris Moayedi was able to afford a modest palatial villa for himself in the Caribbean (see *Eyes passim*).

Labour's other favoured company Capita (aka Crapita) is also in trouble. No sooner had parliamentary criticism died down over its lamentable role in the individual learning accounts (ILAs) fiasco (see *Eyes passim*), than Lord Falconer, home office minister and close friend of Tony Blair, threatened to sue the firm for its equally lamentable performance in running Britain's criminal records.

Needless to say Crapita has also been savaged by the Centre for Financial Research and Analysis for "aggressive accounting" that "provided the opportunity to boost profits".

PS: Britons worried by the US corporate frauds have at least been comforted by trade and industry secretary Patricia Hewitt, who announced on 5 July that she was conducting a review of British business to see how such scandals could be avoided in Britain.

Hewitt's experience of the business world was enhanced by her stint in the mid-90s as research director for what was then Andersen Consulting (now Accenture), then part of the same business empire that audited the accounts of Enron.

NEWS

Enterprising A level music student, Jonathan Higgs exasperated at the ongoing incompetence of Edexcel, has opened a website aimed at getting the failing examining board closed down.

As well as listing Edexhell's catalogue of exam disasters, including his own personal grievances, Higg's has cleverly juxtaposed pictures of its senior management alongside critical comments on the organisation reported in the media in recent months. So next to John Kerr, Edexcel's chief executive is the conclusion of David Dunn, Stockton on Tees headteacher, that the board is guilty of 'unacceptable and sloppy behaviour'. And next to Jerry Jarvis, operations director the phrase 'one mistake to far' appears which was uttered by Phil Willis, on behalf of the Lib Dems . You get the picture. Edexcel have taken it all very seriously and honoured Higgs with the threat of court action. 'The content of this site is libellous. I am taking legal action to have it removed,' wrote IT director Chris Stubbing last week who got 'cavalier disregard' put next to his picture. But so far silence. No doubt m'learned friends have pointed to the defence of 'fair comment'.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"We have to understand that standards vary far too great between schools."

— Estelle Morris, Secretary of State for Educashun, on abandoning the comprehensive system.

GOOD news from East Anglia, where medical ethics are being overseen by Mary Archer, wife of jailed Tory peer Jeffery.

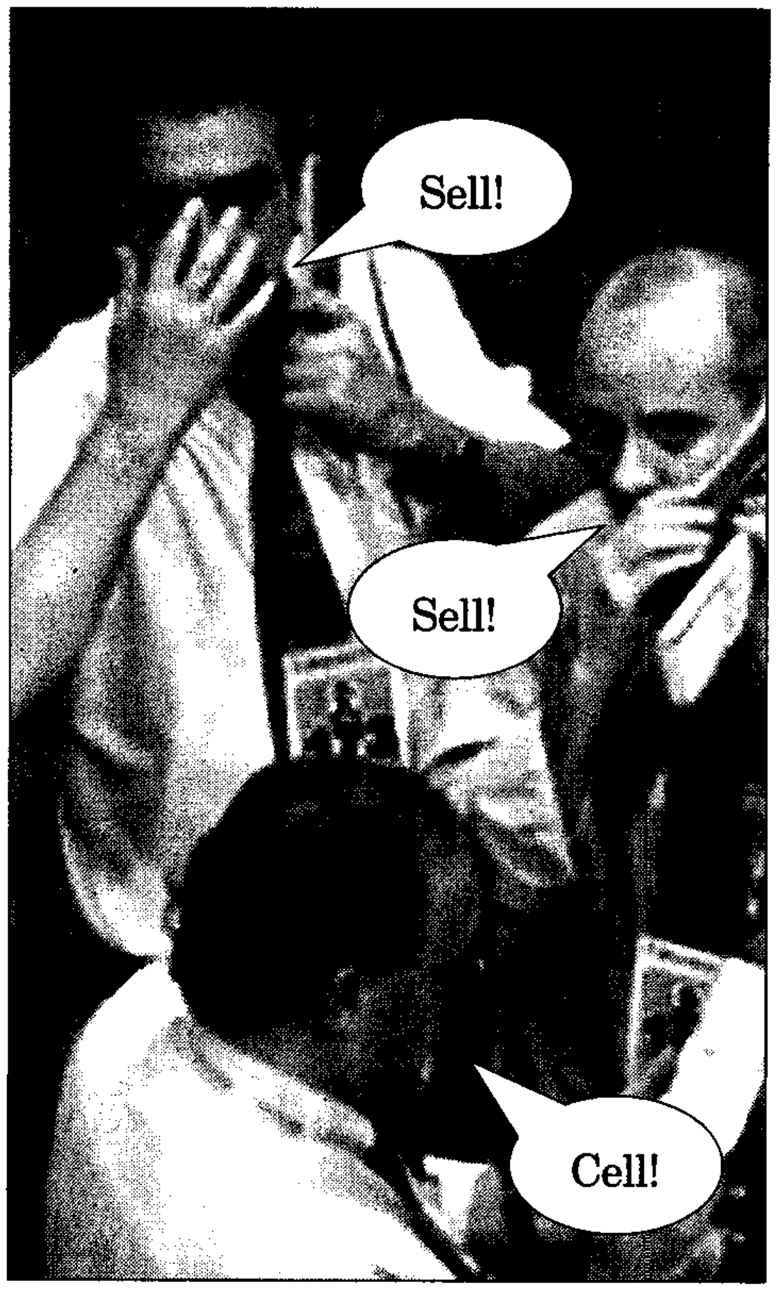
Dr Archer is vice-chairman of Addenbrookes Hospital Trust, Cambridge, where she has formed an ethics forum to help doctors and nurses in "resolving ethical dilemmas". She has invited other hospitals to join, including Papworth, Hitchinbrooke and West Suffolk, and will preside over forum meetings.

Her ethics must have been sorely tested down the years by marriage to Jeffrey. What do you do when your husband makes money by coincidentally buying and selling shares in a firm in which you are a director and privy to financial sensitive information, for example? How far can you go in telling a court that your marriage is full and happy when your husband has been having affairs and paying off prostitutes he has apparently never met?

Mary Archer was immortalised during her husband's 1980s libel trial with the *Daily Star* when the judge, Mr Justice Caulfield, called her a vision of "elegance, fragrance and radiance". But the last time she turned out to stand by her man – in her husband's recent trial for perjury – the judge, Mr Justice Potts, evidently found her and her evidence, somewhat less fragrant.

"Ah, look... his last steps"

HOW U.S. BUSINESS WORKS



Street of Shame

"WHERE are you Milly?" asked John Arlidge in a tasteless search for the missing Surrey schoolgirl in the *Evening Standard* at the end of last month.

"People don't want to talk about her," he reported. Not quite: it was Arlidge nobody wanted to talk *to*.

The hack ignored a sign at Milly's school saying that "all press enquiries should be directed to the council" and demanded to speak to the headmaster. Someone "wearily" told him to go away.

He then went to Milly's parents' house. "There's a pile of bricks and sand outside the family's £300,000 detached redbrick house. Keeping up with the latest home improvements matters," he revealed tackily as the anguished parents hid inside.

Then he telephoned them. "You really must talk to the police. We're doing everything through them," Milly's mother told him.

This he eventually did, to the relief of any reader who survived this far into his 1,783 words of drivel.

WHILE Channel 4 bosses met on Monday to discuss mass-sackings at the loss-making FilmFour, the *Guardian*'s website explained the background to the crisis: "FilmFour is one of the strongest and best-recognised brands in UK film and television, but has suffered a string of big screen flops including *Charlotte Gray* and *Lucky Break*."

Wisely, it neglected yet again to identify the author of the ill-named *Lucky Break*. Step forward Ronan Bennett – whose wife, Georgina Henry, is deputy editor of the *Grauniad* and who recently co-wrote TV's *Fields of Gold* with none other than Alan Rusbridger, the editor of the *Guardian*.

"IS THIS Britain's most eligible bachelor?" wonders the *Sunday Times* Style section in an awestruck puff-piece about Rob Sawyer, the guru behind the Po Na Na chain of Moroccan-themed souk bars.

"Two parts Chelsea smoothie, one part 21st-century Milk Tray man, he has enjoyed a dizzying array of girlfriends, cherry-picked from the cream of the capital's social scene… His lengthy bar-propping sessions are interrupted only by high-octane interludes of kite-surfing, hot-dog skiing and motocross racing."

Too much holidaying, perhaps? The latest results from the Po Na Na Group plc, published two weeks ago, reveal a pre-tax loss of £5.3m for the year to 31 March 2002, compared to a profit of £1.5m the year before. Two of the group's subsidiaries, Po Na Na Trading Ltd and Po Na Na (Hammersmith) Ltd, have still not filed accounts at Companies House which were due as long ago as January.

"Despite his obvious success," the *Sunday Times* gushed, "there is still no stopping Sawyer." The second part of the sentence may be true. Although Po Na Na shares have recently slumped to 53p, valuing the group at less than half the £40m cited by the *Sunday Times*, Rob and his fellow-director Christian Arden benefited from a well-timed sale of 250,000 shares each at 105p per share in January this year — at the very time they were supposed to be filing accounts at Companies House.

RUBICUND *Daily Mail* hack John McEntee recently wrote a short item for his Wicked Whispers column reporting that a Russian scandal-sheet has been ordered to pay $27,000 damages for its false allegation that "Anna Kournikova has got two vaginas."

Alas, Paul Dacre spiked it. "There are," the editor explained sternly, "too many cunts in this newspaper already."

LAST weekend the Irish government published a 10,000-page, 15-volume report into the illegal banking operation of Ansbacher (Cayman Ltd), based in the secretive Cayman Islands. Copies have been sent to the British and American tax authorities, who are likely to be interested in much of the contents.

The report received considerable, if hastily written, coverage in newspapers controlled by Sir Anthony O'Reilly, even making the pages of his London vanity title, the *Independent on Sunday*. Strangely, though, there was no follow-up in Monday's paper, due presumably to space limitations.

This is a shame, because further examination of the report, which had not been pre-released to the media under embargo, reveals a fascinating passage detailing how O'Reilly paid off overdrafts totalling IR£1m which two friends of his had incurred with Ansbacher.

Oddly enough, those pals – Vincent Ferguson and Jim McCarthy – are directors of Independent News and Media plc which owns the *Independent* titles (and other global basket cases). Vincent and Jim had borrowed the money to buy shares secretly in another troubled O'Reilly venture, Atlantic Resources Ltd, now known as Arcon.

There's little doubt that Sir Anthony, Vincent and Jim will all eventually be entirely exonerated of any wrongdoing – something it is to be hoped the *Independent* titles will be able to find space to report when it eventually happens.

ON the day the Worldcom financial scandal broke, the telecom giant was still running expensive press advertisements for its phone services.

Just as the £2.7bn hole in its accounts was emerging, a half-page ad appeared in Scotland's *Herald* newspaper extolling the company's virtues and telling readers: "DON'T OVERPAY!"

This exhortation appeared over a photograph of another white elephant… our very own Greenwich dome.

"Oh no – it's a summer of discontent"

WHACKWATCH

Hard-Hitting Hacks

THE *Observer* may be Britain's oldest and most venerable Sunday newspaper, but it cannot afford to rest on its laurels. And so editor Roger Alton took a dozen or so of his department heads off to an agreeable hotel in Minster Lovell last week to ponder the question: where do we go from here? The assembled hacks quickly came up with the answer: straight to the bar.

First, however, they had to endure a lecture from a special guest, the BBC's business editor Jeff Randall, on why the *Observer* should be more "commercially-minded" and "business-friendly". This provoked an even more severe thirst in several of the hacks, who resented being told how to run a successful Sunday paper by the ex-editor of the failed *Sunday Business*. To their dismay, they then learned that only 20 minutes had been set aside for pre-dinner drinks. "We don't want people to think they're here for a booze-up," managing editor John Duncan explained.

After dinner, news editor Andy Malone and business editor Frank Kane set out to prove him wrong with a marathon session in the bar. When Kane, another former *Sunday Business* hack, attempted to defend his old mate Randall, Malone replied: "You're fucking pissed, you wanker."

Kane retaliated by singing old Fenian songs about cutting Englishmen's throats. Malone, who is known as "the Barlinnie Bruiser" because he worked for the Scottish prison service before entering the rougher world of journalism, was suitably incensed, yelling "Fuck off, wanker!" At this point the mild-mannered political editor Kamal Ahmed attempted to intervene. "Piss off!" Kane told him. "You're Portuguese!" Ahmed, who is in fact half-Sudanese, gave up and went to bed.

After many more fine wines and spirits had been downed, at 1.30am Frank Kane resumed singing his IRA ditties – whereupon the Barlinnie Bruiser punched him, hard. Kane fell on to a fire grate, fracturing several ribs. To complete the charming tableau Malone then keeled over himself, dead drunk, and injured his leg. (This falling-over performance is becoming something of a habit: he did an identical swoon a few weeks ago at a party – or perhaps one should say knees-up – for the *Observer Food Monthly*.)

Came the dawn. As part of the "team-building" exercise, Roger Alton had arranged for the hacks to get up at 7.30 the following morning and play a game of football. Alas, most of them were so competitive – or maybe just hungover – that the game was a riot of wild tackling and mud-wrestling. To complete a most productive 24 hours in the history of the *Observer*, acting review editor Tim Adams left the pitch with a broken nose.

When editor Roger Alton staggered into the office the next day, he wandered unsteadily around the newsroom with a faraway look in his eye. "Fuck fuck fuck," he muttered over and over again. "What the fuck's happening to this paper?

MAN IN THE EYE

DANIEL JEFFREYS

SO farewell then, Daniel Jeffreys. The *Daily Mail* has finally dispensed with the services of its prolific New York correspondent, four months after he delivered an exclusive eye-witness account of the death of British-born Tracy Housel, executed by lethal injection in a Georgia prison.

Billed as "the only British reporter at the execution", Jeffreys wrote that "I watched through a glass screen in the neighbouring room. What happened will haunt my dreams and reshape them into nightmares for years." In fact, Jeffreys had seen nothing at all: as other newspapers swiftly pointed out, he was standing outside in the car park with the rest of the press pack, relying on the accounts of witnesses as they emerged.

Any rejoicing over his belated departure from the *Mail* would be premature, however, since the preposterous Jeffreys has an astonishing ability to bounce back from disaster. In his report from the Georgia car-park he claimed that "witnessing men being killed is something I have seen before in war zones. An execution is quite different". Extensive study of his career turns up no evidence that he was ever a war correspondent, but he has certainly had a remarkable variety of other jobs.

After a stint teaching sixth-form girls and boys at Westminster School, young Daniel went off to work for the CBI, and thence to the blue-blooded stockbrokers Cazenoves. In 1988, shortly after Jeffreys's 32nd birthday, the new Birtist regime in BBC news appointed him as the corporation's economics and business editor. When disgruntled BBC hacks asked why a man with no journalistic or broadcasting experience whatever had been given such a senior post, they were told that John Birt had been dazzled by Jeffreys's articulate and debonair manner.

Alas! There was little evidence of it on television and he was widely ridiculed as "the bimbo". Desperate to assert some authority, he fired off a memo to his bosses claiming that he was determined to "set the agenda", to be "first and fastest", to give "state of the art" business coverage – "BUT the newsroom impedes this process". How so? His fellow hacks were "insufficiently aware of the microeconomic complexities" and had "insufficient regard for the profit motive as a determinant of human behaviour".

Jeffreys's own financial management was somewhat erratic, however. In August 1989, returning from an IMF summit in Washington, he went to collect his BBC-issue Rover 216 from the long-stay car park at Heathrow. Unable to find his keys, he decided he had never much liked the car anyway, took a taxi into London and left the Rover at the airport for the next four months, running up parking fees of £5,000.

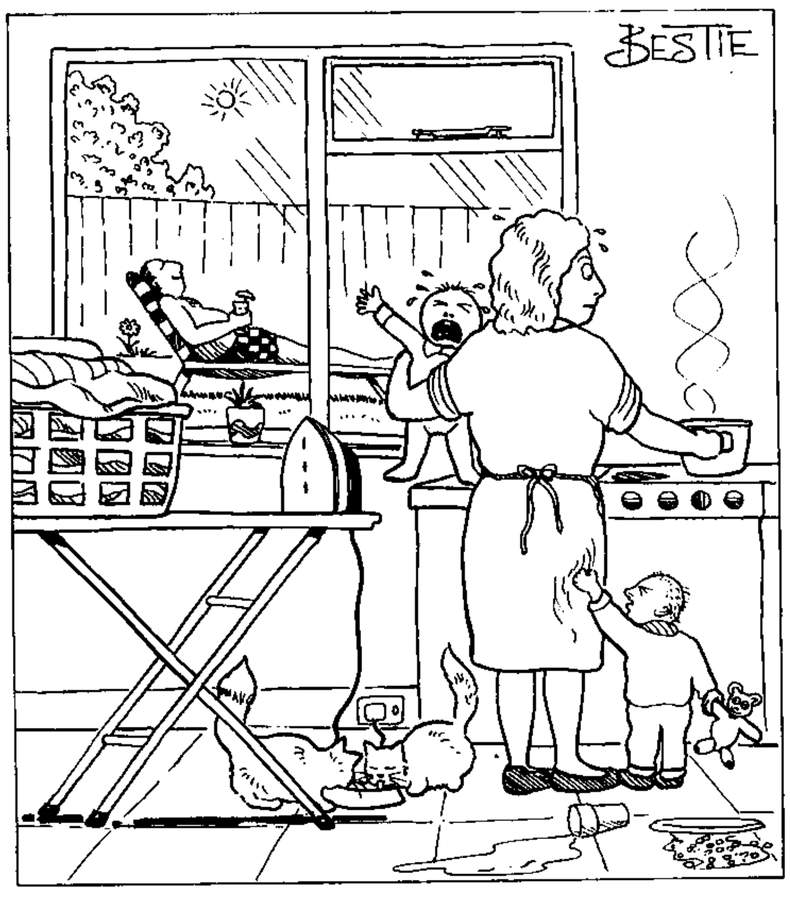
After just a year in television, Jeffreys returned to the City as a "global equity strategist" at Citicorp Scrimgeour Vickers. "Old habits die hard," he explained to the *Daily Telegraph*. "Instead of filming brief television reports I wanted to be on the dealing floor." But after a mere 10 days at Citicorp he was sacked as part of a "downsizing exercise", with only a £35,000 pay-off and his company XJS to console him.

After a stint as "strategic economist" at fund managers Henderson Administration, Jeffreys headed off to seek his fortune as a hack in New York, freelancing under a pseudonym for the *Times* while working for the *New York Post*. Alas again! His greatest front-page "scoop" for the *Post*, an interview with the father of errant New York cop Justin Volpe (who got a 30-year sentence for sodomising a suspect with a broomstick), turned out to be a fabrication.

Questions were also raised about a *Post* article on 19 June 2000, which included copious quotes from unnamed NYPD officers commenting on an incident the previous week in which the police failed to prevent a mob attacking 50 women in Central Park. As the *Village Voice* pointed out, identical quotes had appeared in the *Times* back in April, long before the incident, in a piece written by one Gregory Demaine – aka Daniel Jeffreys. Daniel claimed that after the mass-assault "I reinterviewed all the cops I spoke to". Amazingly enough, they somehow repeated their quotes verbatim. ("There is terribly low morale. Young officers are walking on eggshells…" etc.)

Never mind. By then, the *Daily Mail* couldn't get enough of Jeffreys, who was able to dash off censorious why-oh-why pieces on all the paper's favourite subjects – drugs, homosexuality, popular culture and so forth. It particularly loved his rants against Bill Clinton, an "amoral" sleazebag who "finds marital fidelity difficult". He described public acceptance of Clinton's philandering as "a damning indictment of a nation that has abandoned the puritan ideals of its founders".

One of his former lovers wrote to Paul Dacre pointing out that Jeffreys had at least two ex-wives, plus a case in the family courts for maintenance. Had Dacre heeded the warnings, he wouldn't have ended up with egg all over his face after the latest *débâcle*.



THE WIFE OF RILEY

O·B·N·K

"What she is interested in at the moment, however, is being the best possible mother to Damian. When I called her up to ask her to dinner last week with a mutual friend, she said she couldn't make it because it was her nanny's night off."

WILLIAM CASH on Liz Hurley
Evening Standard

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

8.30 The Most Evil Men And Women In History
Quentin Willson reveals some of the more fanciful excuses given by speeding motorists to avoid picking up points on their licences, while Tiff Needell test-drives the new MGTF.

Hot Tickets, Evening Standard

IN THE TEAROOM

THEY'VE had the private tutors in the tearoom all week, but still Labour backbenchers can't work out whether Downing Street has made the political arithmetic add up for the euro. It's a real headscratcher.

Take sterling's fall on the foreign exchange markets, for instance. You'd think that would be good news for the Yes side of the equation. But when Number 10 staffers ring to sound out all those big manufacturing exporters who've been screaming about how we need to join up because the exchange rate was driving them bust, they go all coy on the subject.

Will they please helpfully threaten all their workers with redundancy if we don't join fastish? Er, no. With the erosion of the exchange rate differential, they're not that bothered anymore. And without the threat of mass layoffs, Philip Gould isn't going to crunch that magic 45 percent in favour from his focus groups that will trigger the referendum. Follow so far? Good.

Now, let's look at house prices. What have house prices to do with the euro? Sharpen up dummy, or you'll never get that A-grade. If we want in to the euro, interest rates have to go down. But if the property market overheats, they have to go up. Or something like that. Now add in the public sector pay claims, the collapsing stock markets and the general perception that all accountants – and by extension, statistics – are fraudulent... and what are you left with?

The Five Tests. Correct. But what if one doesn't work out? Can two and two make five? Alas, in this particular area of government policy, they can't. It's an exception. But what you can do is "carry one". Let me spell that out. If only four out of five tests are met, instead of saying "that's a fail", you say "four have been met and we'll carry the other one", thus postponing the referendum into the third term. Still with me?

Then there's X – otherwise known as the chancellor's current mood. If he's impatiently wishing that bloody man Blair would hurry up and get his "place in history" and then move on, then that's a big plus for those who want to go for it now. But he's just as likely to come over all principled, swearing he's never going to sacrifice the poor and the pensioners just to satisfy that bloody man next door's vanity. And that's a minus. And there's another unknown variable too – the fact the chancellor has decided to show his workings. Normally, when Gordon Brown lets slip which way his mind is working, you can bet the outcome will be very different. He's a master at sending the media up the wrong pole.

In fact no one in the tearoom has really figured out the answer to the great teaser of the moment – will there be an early referendum? The important lesson is that when politicians don't know something, they don't say nothing. They'll say anything.

'Urquhart'

THE idea, only partly fanciful, that Tony Blair might one day become president of the European Union has clearly taken root in some quarters.

At a recent reception in the American embassy in Brussels, a senior US trade negotiator stopping off on his way to World Trade Organisation talks in Geneva, observed to those around him: "Tony Blair is president of the EU, right?"

In the interests of diplomacy, the Europeans present bit their lips and gently put the man right.

HOW attitudes have changed at the treasury! It seems only yesterday that the new economic secretary there, Helen Liddell, was scolding companies who mis-sold pensions under the Tories for not putting their house in order.

It was she who insisted on drawing up a "name and shame" list of the mis-selling companies. And right at the top of it was the good old reliable Prudential, which swindled more pensioners and potential pensioners than any other company.

Now another junior treasury minister, Ruth Kelly, proudly announces the appointment of a new chief executive of the National Savings Movement. The new man to take charge of some £62bn of national savings is Mr Alan Cook, chief operations officer at, er, the Prudential!

WITH the fate of Ken Livingstone, the man who keeps getting thrown out of parties, hanging in the balance (Labour's national executive committee meets soon to decide whether to let him back in to one party at least), what will Labour do if Livingstone insists on standing in next year's London mayoral election?

Greater London Authority member John Biggs is up to his usual tricks working behind the scenes for an "anyone but Ken" figure, while others such as Peter Mandelson are whispering sweet nothings into the ear of another hopeful, GLA member Trevor Phillips. (Others are warning "Clever" Trevor not to be so daft as to throw his hat into the ring this time around and to let someone else mount the suicide attack.)

Labour chiefs are also toying with the idea of running an official candidate and advising Labour voters to give their second preference vote to Ken, thus depriving Steve "Shagger" Norris of the mayorality. But a split vote could see Shagger triumph – and certain defeat for some key GLA Labourites such as Val Shawcross. No wonder the lights are burning into the night at Millbank.

ONCE upon a time – four years ago to be exact – Labour's annual awkward squad elections to the party's national executive committee were held in the autumn and announced at the annual party conference.

They were seen as a barometer of party opinion; no more so than when Ken Livingstone publicly humiliated Peter Mandelson in the vote. As a result of the subsequent shock victory of left-wing barrister Liz Davies, whom Tony Blair had famously blocked from being a parliamentary candidate, Labour chiefs decided that the contentious elections to the constituency section of the NEC would be held and announced in mid summer, while the union elections to the NEC would still be announced at conference.

Smelling a rat, the media largely denounced Labour for wanting to bury bad news. But when results for this year's elections dribbled out of Millbank on a Friday afternoon a fortnight ago, not a single newspaper, radio or TV station reported the results.

TAKING his cue from Labour party chairman Charles Clarke who attacked the press for being "pious and hypocritical", home secretary David Blunkett joined the fray.

Speaking at a conference on criminal justice, Blunkett said: "I have the misfortune every day – and I shouldn't really do it – to read Britain's newspapers. It infuriates me when the sanctimonious have the nerve to try and portray the process of finding a way through the political maze as some sort of betrayal... We still get it these days, not so much from the Trotskyists, but more from those who combine cynicism and liberalism in equal measure."

Is this Blunkett code for the increasingly unloved *Grauniad*? Ministers, such as Blunkett are never happier than when castigating the *Guardian* for being a newspaper "written by Trots for liberals".

ON 26 June the Commons debated Bedfordshire county council's report on the fire that destroyed Yarl's Wood detention centre.

The debate was opened by the Tory MP for North-East Bedfordshire, Alistair Burt, who wanted the government to explain why fire brigade advice to install sprinklers at Yarl's Wood had been ignored. He was puzzled by evidence to the inquiry from Paul Quibell of the home office, who said the cost of fitting sprinklers "wasn't really a factor at that time". Oh no?

Mr Burt had a letter from the chief fire officer for Bedfordshire, Jeff Goddard, who wrote: "There was a meeting early in 2001 at Bedfordshire Fire Headquarters attended by myself... when the fitting of sprinklers was a single topic of debate. The Fire Service stance being to strongly recommend sprinklers, this recommendation being resisted by the Head of the Immigration Service (at the Home Office) on grounds of cost."

Mr Burt described this rather generously as "a clear and serious contradiction" and expected that the matter would be resolved by the special (and secret) inquiry into the Yarl's Wood fire by Stephen Moore, of the prison service. Imagine his shock when he discovered that Mr Goddard, the chief fire officer, was not even contacted by Mr Moore when he was writing his report.

Mr Burt asked: "Is Mr Moore, a home office official, not hopelessly compromised in his search for the truth by his lack of independence?" Mr Burt asked a lot of other questions about the Moore inquiry. He wanted to know, for instance, how many people from Group 4, the company in charge of the detention centre, had been interviewed by Moore. Beverley Hughes, minister for citizenship and immigration, replied to the debate. In a very short speech, she described sprinklers as "clearly a critical matter". She went on: "All I can say at this stage is that the Home Secretary (Jack Straw) decided not to fit them on the basis of a range of advice from different sources." That was it.

No explanation as to whether the decision was made on grounds of cost, and no explanation why the prison service official who carried out the inquiry did not even contact the fire officer who originally recommended sprinklers. No explanation about anything really – just the usual prevarication and half-truths. Ms Hughes has a long and glittering career ahead in the "new" Labour government.

FOREIGN office minister Peter Hain marked the UN's International Day in Support of Victims of Torture at the end of June declaring: "Torture has no place in the 21st century." His opposition would be all the more convincing if his government weren't tooling up the torturers.

Labour is increasing arms exports and military aid to Nepal just as Amnesty International accuses the kingdom of using the "War against Terrorism" to ignore human rights.

While foreign secretary Jack Straw recently condemned attacks on civilians there by Nepal's Maoist guerrillas, neither he nor Hain has said anything about the way Nepal's corrupt royalty responded to the uprising with their own torture and killing.

Britain leads western support for Nepal. Last month the foreign office hosted a conference on Nepal with the World Bank, after which it announced Britain's military support would increase. Last year weapons worth £1m left Britain for Nepal, including assault rifles and pistol parts. This will increase tenfold to include military assistance including combat helicopters.

According to Amnesty, even before the current fighting 130 people had "disappeared" from police custody. Torture, rape and killings by Nepal's armed forces are common, and Amnesty believes many of the deaths recorded in firefights with guerrillas are in fact summary executions of often unarmed non-combatants.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Nayana wangled an invite to the wedding ceremony which was held in the gardens of a flash private villa overlooking the Indian Ocean... The wedding was for the daughter of wealthy arms dealers, the Hindujas, so I was surprised to see former Prime Minister Edward Heath wandering about in a silk turban. He was surprised to see me, too."

— From Boy George's autobiography, *Take it like a man.*

WORLD OF HYPE

THE Scottish Parliament Business Exchange is the innocuous-sounding organisation that helps businesses buy their own Holyrood MP for £6,000 a year.

For this sum a company can second an MSP to its business "for information" purposes, and have him or her sign a commercial confidentiality clause so they can't reveal what they've learned.

Take backbench Labour MSP Margaret Jamieson, for example, who has been seconded to the drugs giant Pfizer (whose chief Scottish lobbyist Lynda Gauld happens to be a member of the board of Scottish Parliament Business Exchange).

Jamieson, who represents Kilmarnock, is deputy chair of the parliamentary health committee and an active member of the cross-party parliamentary groups on asthma, epilepsy and cancer – all of keen commercial interest to big drug companies.

Other companies planning to hire tame MSPs for corporate brain-washing include loss-making nuclear giant British Energy and Scottish Power.

Meanwhile, a statement issued in the name of Lord David Steel, speaker of the Scottish parliament, tried to stress the purity of the business group by assuring voters that MSPs would not take money directly from their business sponsors for travel or accommodation. That's because those bills will be paid by the exchange – or the parliament (ie the taxpayer) itself.

MMR UPDATE

THOUGH a recent survey showed that 76 percent of the public now want a full inquiry into the safety of the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) triple vaccine, the government and pharmaceutical companies appear to be responding perversely: making it impossible for parents to obtain alternative single jabs.

Vaccine supplier GlaxoSmithKline announced last weekend that it will stop manufacturing single rubella jabs at its factory in Belgium. However, supplies of the single jab were already drying up as the government imposed restrictions, claiming it needed to ensure it had enough for mothers-to-be. Meanwhile GPs and other providers of single jabs say they are having difficulty obtaining the other single components of measles and mumps too. It means some children who have started single courses are not able to complete them.

Idis, one of the main vaccine distributors in this country, blamed shortages on the manufacturers. Director Natalie Wood said it was searching worldwide for supplies but was still having difficulty fulfilling orders.

And Dr Michael Debenham, who has children part way through vaccination courses, said he had tried to buy single jabs via Spanish distributors. However, he says he was told that distributors had agreed not to export single vaccines outside of their own countries.

Whether that is true or not, to parents it looks like a move by government and drugs companies to force them to accept MMR. Many parents still want proof of safety that goes beyond the existing epidemiological studies and reviews. Despite assurances from Peter Dukes, of the Medical Research Council, that it was "listening to parents" and was open to requests for funding for meaningful research, it has – not for the first time – just turned down such a project from Edinburgh University and Edinburgh Sick Children's Hospital.

"We'd better get it fixed. You never know when the Ofsted inspectors might call"

THE road lobby's latest tactic in its campaign for billions of pounds to be spent on new and bigger roads is to attack the rail system.

The Freight Transport Association has been telling the treasury in advance of the comprehensive spending review: "Rail is currently failing and it would be sensible to bring forward improvements to key stretches of motorway as soon as possible." Oops! Last year rail freight increased by 9 percent while lorry freight declined (by a billion tonne-km), raising rail's share of the market by 1 percent. As it is lorries that are "currently failing", the FTA's argument must mean improvements to key stretches of railway should be brought forward.

PS: One reason rail does sometimes "fail" is the horrifying number of incompetent truckers who crash into bridges and on to train tracks (*Eye* 1024). Last week a lorry smashed on to the East Anglia mainline in Essex and was hit by a freight train. Trains were suspended for most of the day – while the truckers simply went a different way.

'Backbiter'

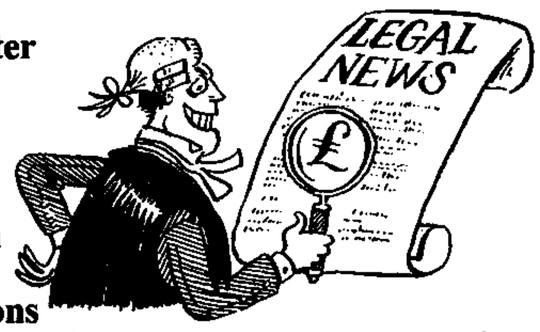
HANDS ON ORGAN DAY
CENTRAL CHURCHES OF BATH
Wiltshire & Bath Organists Association

COMPUTER NEWS

THE consultancy division of PriceWaterhouseCooper (PwC) paid £75m to revamp its image and change its name to the brilliantly innovative, er, Monday.

As part of this rebranding it also launched introducingmonday.com to explain its new vision to prospective clients. Shame it didn't spare the small fee required to obtain the .co.uk domain name too. Interested clients logging on to introducingmonday.co.uk are now greeted by the childish but hugely amusing sight of two hands doing energetic V-signs and a message which reads, "La la la, we've got your name."

Whatever could it mean?



THE day after the audit commission criticised the waste of £80m a year through adjournments and cancellations of trials in courts, the crown prosecution service (CPS) proved that the law is still an ass with the following catalogue of postponement and convolution.

The CPS asked Rhondda magistrates' court to commit Tim Richards, a law lecturer, to Merthyr crown court for trial on the apparently "serious" charge of inciting people to paint anti-monarchist slogans. This charge related to a hypothetical discussion at an anti-Jubilee meeting and Richards pleads not guilty.

Although the charge seemed absurd, the CPS insisted that as this was a common law offence it had no jurisdiction to try it. When the case came before Justice Curren 10 days later, the judge asked the CPS solicitor how much damage had been caused, to which he got the response "inestimable".

But when further questioned as to whether any physical damage had occurred, the CPS was forced to admit that no slogan had actually been painted. The judge remarked that the case was a waste of time and money, but that he had no choice other than to send it back to Tonypandy magistrates' court to be dealt with properly.

Come 2 July, therefore, the trying dilemma facing the magistrates was just how much hypothetical damage might have been caused, had there been any slogans painted. The myriad complexities of assessing damageless damage have now occupied three separate court hearings, with concomitant expenses, and the trial rumbles on – most recently the magistrates sent the case to Pontypridd magistrates' court for a pre-trial hearing on 31 July.

ITV

Summer Schedules (ITV1 / BBC1)

ABOUT three years ago, the spin doctors for the main terrestrial channels starting disputing the theory that summer TV was filled with repeats and things which the controllers stuck out in the hope that most of the viewers were abroad and the critics were in Tuscany. Advertisers and licence-payers, it was claimed, had both demanded better and now they were going to get it. They would see programmes always aimed at July and August rather than series relegated from March and September.

Well, it was a nice theory but, looking at this year's hot-month schedules, it's once again apparent that, as the holiday-makers head out the door, programming values are thrown out the window. Take, for example, ITV1 and peak-time on Wednesday 10 July. Filling the schedule, either side of the news, is *The Spy Who Loved Me*.

How many times have you seen that? How many times – subsequently – have you seen it in the *TV Times* and made a mental note not to switch it on? Purchased long ago as a Christmas and Easter treat on ITV, the 007 films are now padding-programming for the times of the year when budgets and inspiration have run low.

The rest of the week is equally desperate. A screening of that must-see movie *Lawnmower Man 2* and *Home On Their Own*, a desperate *Home Front* rip-off in which Ulrika Jonsson assists children in redesigning the family pile while the parents are away. Oh, and Saturday peak-time has that most depressing viewing moment when a bad idea for a series reaches a dreadful idea for an episode: *It Shouldn't Happen To... A TV Vet*.

There is one impressive programme on the third channel this week: *Shipman*, a tasteful and journalistic drama-doc about the Dr Jekyll of Hyde. Yet, while welcome, even this is a sign of the problems at ITV1 which led to programme director David Liddiment, as long predicted in these columns, being forced to resign last week. Not vulgar enough to claim the mass audience, while too sombre to attract advertisers, *Shipman* is another example of the quasi-C4 stuff – *Bob And Rose*, *2DTV*, *Othello* – which Liddiment has favoured at ITV1.

It's the kind of programming which used to be known in commercial TV as a "franchise-survivor": upmarket shows to convince the IBA/ITC to renew your licence next time. That's the reason *The South Bank Show* ever existed. But, with TV much more loosely regulated now, such insurance is no longer necessary. It's ironic that Liddiment should finally fall in the summer because, apart from *Shipman*, the July schedule actually contains the lazy, brainless scheduling he needed to create all year round.

When TV casting directors get mugged

Over at BBC1, there's equal evidence that suntan oil rather than elbow grease is the schedulers' present lotion of choice. With ratings-banker *Casualty* off for its hols, last Saturday night was a sort of anti-Cannes: with three terrible failed movies stripped across the evening between 8pm and 1.30am: *Patch Adams*, *Event Horizon* and *Dream House*. In the first of those, for anyone lucky enough to have missed it, Robin Williams plays a doctor who makes cancer patients feel better by putting on a red plastic nose and making faces.

Even a good idea for a series – *The Weakest Link* – has reached a pisspoor edition: with celebrity lookalikes competing. On Wednesday, BBC1 is burying away its own sporting bad-buy, a smaller-scale equivalent of ITV1's football fiascos: exclusive coverage of Audley Harrison's sixth professional bout in *Heavyweight Boxing*.

By Friday, there's a programme so dire that the culture secretary should probably order the BBC to organise an emergency airlift of any viewers planning to stay in the country this summer: *Jim Davidson On The Edge*, which is apparently "the second of three special shows from Southampton's Mayflower Theatre". You might want to get down to Thomas Cook before the third.

What's happened is that BBC1 has become so obsessed with competing with ITV1 – sticking out regular press releases claiming ratings victory – that there's no longer any merit in one side trying while the other isn't. The commercial boys traditionally take their eyes off the screen in the summer, so BBC1 gives up as well, ensuring an even spread of mediocrity.

There's no doubt, though, that the channel should be given a special Publicity Brassneck award at this year's BAFTAs for its claim that 13 million people tuned in to watch late-evening coverage of Henman and Rusedski playing at Wimbledon on BBC1. As the corporation well knows, a huge proportion of those people had their sets left on because of the clever promise that *EastEnders* would begin when the match ended.

As the general view of tennis commentators was that 2002 was Henman and Rusedski's final chance to flourish in SW19, the BBC is unlikely to have this artificial ratings-booster next year.

'Square Eyes'

MEDIA NEWS

SO THE BBC is getting into bed with Rupert Murdoch to provide 24 channels of free-to-view digital telly, saving the government a humiliating climb down over its plans for digital franchises.

Costs will be shared between the BBC and BSkyB but they will be high (as Carlton and Granada found to their horror) and the struggle to attract big audiences remains.

This is bad news for most licence-payers. According to the BBC's own figures, "less than 100,000 households have free-to-air digital TV" and projections for growth are dismal until 2007. The trouble is that the 24 channels on offer are mostly pisspoor: Sky Travel, ITV 2, a shopping channel and endless space for repeats on BBC Choice, which claims a mere 0.57 percent audience share. Several of the other channels are reserved for digital radio; but they are already available on digital receivers.

JOHN SWEENEY's report for Radio Four's *File on Four* on 2 July into the unsafe conviction of solicitor Sally Clark for killing her two sons not only generated much publicity, including an item on the BBC *Six O'Clock News*, but it contributed to the decision to send the case back to the appeal court.

Strange, then, that when Sweeney offered the same story to *Panorama* in August last year he was told "it's not a story".

DUMB BRITAIN

BBC Radio Humberside afternoon quiz

Paul Hartley: Which ocean would you cross if you sailed from San Francisco to Sydney? This is the world's largest ocean.

Contestant: The Mediterranean.

Hartley: What type of transport is a VC10?

Same contestant: Er...

Hartley: I'll give you a choice: is it a train, a car or a plane?

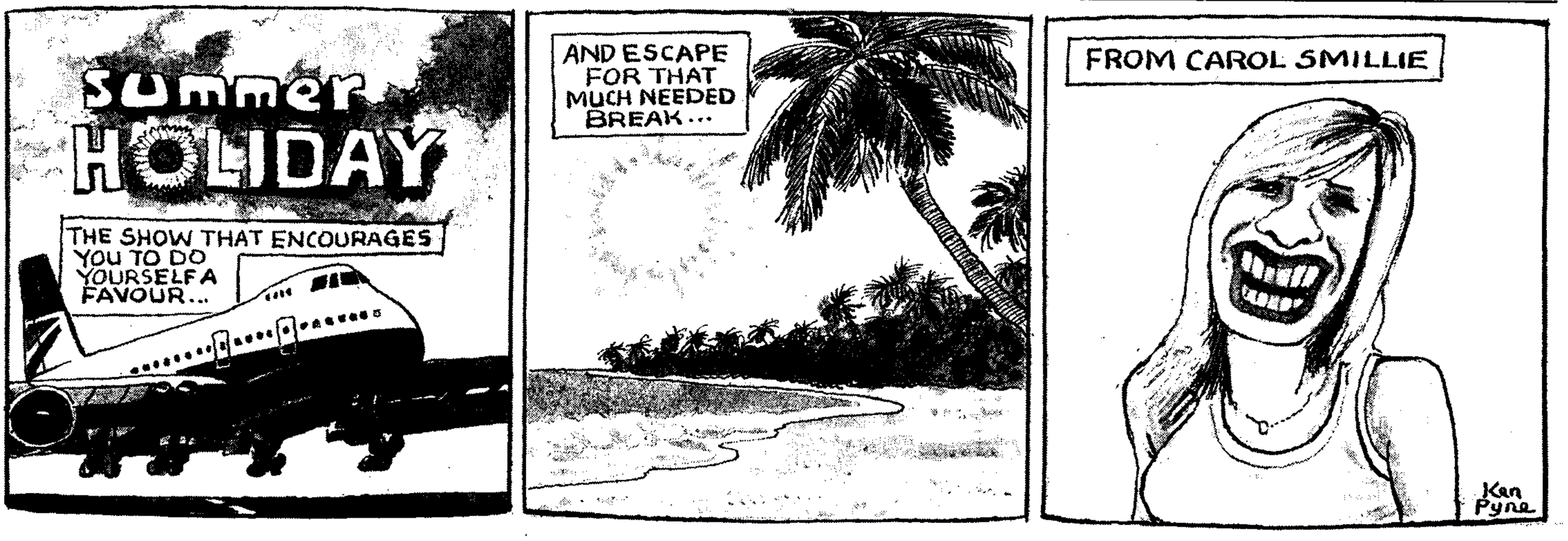
Contestant: A car.

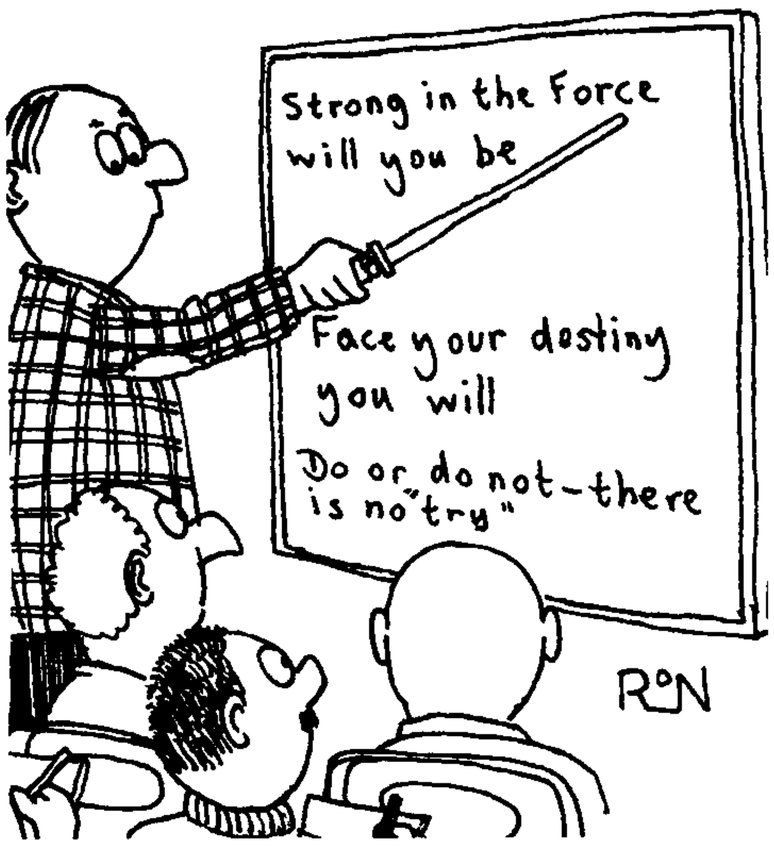
DUMB AMERICA

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: William Shakespeare wrote seven plays about Kings of England who all shared the same name. What name?

Contestant: Oh... I don't have an answer... [moment of inspiration]... Ralph?


Summer HOLIDAY
THE SHOW THAT ENCOURAGES YOU TO DO YOURSELF A FAVOUR...
AND ESCAPE FOR THAT MUCH NEEDED BREAK...
FROM CAROL SMILLIE
Ken Pyne



Yoda classes

GOING LIVE

THE BBC's *Ten O'Clock News* went live to Stephen Sackur in the United States on 4 July for the latest on the shooting at Los Angeles airport.

So… what was the latest? "Well, as I speak to you the FBI are giving a news conference in Los Angeles," said Sackur from his handy vantage point 2,000 miles away in Washington.

THE BBC's broadcast and presentation department is responding to Greg Dyke's "Cut the Crap – Make It Happen" initiative by… forming a new raft of focus groups with names such as "Celebrate Success Together", "Move From Elitist To Inclusive" and "Internally Focussed to Externally Focussed".

Given that staff aren't exactly rushing to join this quaintly Birtist way of making nothing happen, perhaps the man himself could be persuaded back to lead one of them?

***CHANNEL 4 News* exploded from the blocks on Sunday night with coverage of HMS Nottingham hitting rocks 200 miles off the coast of northeast Australia.**

Unfortunately communications between the news team and picture desk had also run aground: the piece ran with a picture of an aircraft carrier, not a destroyer.

Note to C4 picture desk: Aircraft carriers are the ones with the huge runway with planes on.

LAST issue's Hackwatch told how *Sun* editor David Yelland was desperate to increase the profile of his hapless scribblers by getting their faces on to the BBC.

It now emerges that not only has Yelland been hawking his hacks to telly, but he's hired PR company Cohn & Wolfe to help. The company is under strict instructions to keep the assignment secret – in case they upset some of the Sun's competitors with whom they regularly place puff-pieces for other clients.

These include Coca-Cola, Visa and a raft of pharmaceutical firms including GlaxoSmithKline, Merck Sharp & Dohme and AstraZeneca. C&W specialises in healthcare PR and so is often responsible for those "miracle cancer cure" stories that have saved so many a flaccid Mail front-page.

THE BBC's 6 O'Clock News on 5 July proved itself once again as the ultimate free ad for the rest of the evening's schedule.

Although two people had been shot dead at Los Angeles airport the day before, the programme preceded such piffling matters with some excerpts from an interview with David Bowie, followed by the inevitable "…and you can see more of that interview later…"

AD NAUSEAM

ONE result of the 11 September terrorist attacks has been the demise of a large chunk of the advertising industry. "Above-the-line" advertising, meaning the traditional media of TV, press and posters, has been most affected. There has been much comment about this – but precious little about what is filling the void.

So-called direct marketing (DM) has never had it so good. While TV and newspaper ad revenues are going down the pan, the latest figures for junk mail, telemarketing (sweet-talking phone pests), online marketing (irritant pop-ups), straight-to-bin newspaper inserts and door-to-door gadflies are up by 10 percent. This makes an accumulation of parasitic intrusion worth £11bn to the industry.

Signs countrywide saying "no junk mail" and bins full of once-in-a-lifetime offers are testimony to the fact that junk mail is even more of an imposition than ad breaks. At least you can make a cup of tea in an ad break. But with junk mail, the mailshots are often disguised so as to dupe the reader into opening them.

The means for such hoodwinking are becoming ever more underhand: a 10 percent growth in the industry has brought with it a 51% rise in complaints to the Advertising Standards Authority. These include two of last year's most-complained about ads: one a mailshot offering instant weight-loss; the other a mailing for Telewest Broadband that masqueraded as a speeding ticket, to obvious deleterious effect.

A current DM campaign from the Capital One Bank dresses a standard plug for a credit card as important formal correspondence ("Dated Material Enclosed" etc); several political parties used printed "hand-written" notes to give the appearance of that personal touch in last month's local elections. It all suggests that we have not just more junk mail to look forward to, but more junk mail that you can't tell is junk.

THE government may be Britain's biggest advertiser but its propaganda department, COI Communications, suddenly finds itself in total disarray.

In the last month the COI chief executive and Labour's chief adviser on marketing communications and information campaigns, Carol Fisher, has resigned with no job to go to. It is thought that Fisher, initially recruited from the private sector, got fed up after a long-term row with the department of transport, local government and the regions (DTLR) which decided to appoint its own advertising agencies – precisely what the COI is supposed to do. The DTLR managed to spend £20m of taxpayer's money… and came up with six agencies that were all on the COI roster already.

A week later Nick Dear, chair of the government's advisory committee on advertising, also quit. Dear, ex-British Airways, was exasperated at "banging my head against a brick wall" over the government's failure to stop the DTLR bypassing COI. He felt central government had continually failed to act on the warnings of his committee. "I've decided I'd rather sit in a deckchair and read," he said before departing.

A replacement for the widely-admired Fisher needs to be found pronto: the government's advertising budget of £195m needs someone to spend it. Crucially, Douglas Alexander, an arch-Brownite, has been appointed to come up with someone suitable. This is unlikely to go down well with Labour's other communications guru, a certain Blairite named Alistair Campbell, as Carol Fisher reported to him (even though COI Communications is supposed to be a non-political body).

Apparently Alexander will again look to the private sector. If Fisher and Dear's experiences with Labour are anything to go by, applications are unlikely to come flooding in.

CINEMAGOERS will have been delighted by a new commercial for All:sports, the sports retailer. The 60-second spot tells the viewer that although they might live a long life and enjoy sex until their old age, they "cannot have it all".

One particular scene – in which a young couple enjoy a steamy tussle in a toilet cubicle – has caused consternation. On the wall there is some graffiti, which clearly reads "CSA are blood-sucking bastards", a reference to the Child Support Agency.

When All:sports' advertising agency McCann Erickson won the job in 1999, their brief was to show a "real understanding of the teenage market". Do teenagers think the CSA are blood-sucking bastards? All:sports appear to think so, as though they and McCann were aware of the graffiti, both decided to leave it in the advert.

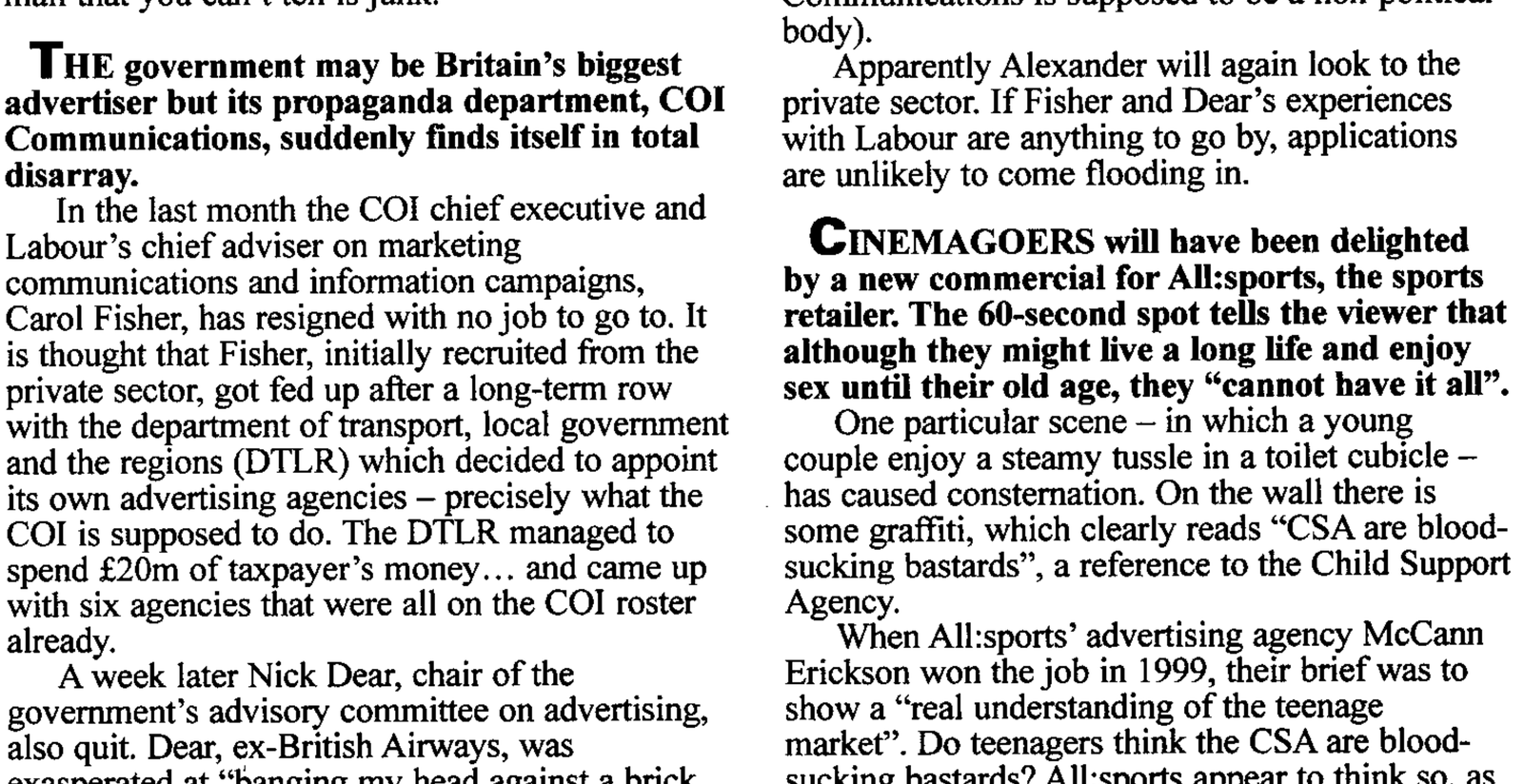
SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore

Ronaldous Huxley

SUPERMODELS

KERBER


AGENCY
I'VE BEEN HANGING OUT WITH BILL CLINTON!
I KNOW, NAOMI ...IT'S BEEN ALL OVER THE PAPERS
NAOMI CAMPBELL SEEN OUT WITH BILL
I MEAN, WE'RE TALKING ABOUT ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST POWERFUL PEOPLE!!!
BUT I STILL FIND TIME FOR SOMEONE INSIGNIFICANT LIKE BILL CLINTON!
THAT'S BECAUSE YOU CARE ABOUT PEOPLE, DARLING!

DOING THE ROUNDS

JANARDAN Dhasmana, one of the surgeons at the centre of the Bristol cardiac disaster, is taking the United Bristol Healthcare Trust (UBHT) to an employment tribunal a fortnight after being cleared by the General Medical Council to "resume full surgical practice without conditions".

Dhasmana, who has the worst record for infant switch operations in the published literature, argues that his results for adult heart surgery have always been acceptable and that UBHT chief executive Hugh Ross was wrong to sack him in 1998, thus depriving him of a salary and a pension built up after years of service to the NHS.

His financial situation is in marked contrast to his senior colleague James Wisheart, who was more culpable for the failings in Bristol and yet retired with a full pension boosted considerably by an A+ merit award.

Dhasmana's fate was probably sealed by then health secretary Frank Dobson, who said he wouldn't let Dhasmana operate on him, and criticised the GMC for not striking him off after finding him guilty of serious professional misconduct (he was instead banned from operating on children for three years). Dhasmana is now 62 and despite undergoing a retraining programme at Newcastle's Freeman Hospital, is unlikely to find employment easily. He has repeatedly apologised and expressed remorse, and some parents who lost children after his surgery at Bristol believe he should have been allowed to retire with his pension.

Whether he should be free to operate without restrictions is debatable, and says much about the collective guilt of the medical establishment. The GMC failed to investigate Bristol despite its most long-serving council member, Dr Michael O'Donnell, raising concerns after what he'd read in the Eye in 1992. His inquiry statement says these were met "with intense apathy". When the shit hit the fan, the GMC deflected all the flak on to the surgeons and the chief executive, finding them guilty of failing to act on their audit results when the GMC hadn't either. They have now reinstated Dhasmana without any published statistical proof of his competence — just the good word of fellow surgeons. When it comes to patient safety, the GMC is as woolly-minded as ever.

The Royal College of Surgeons and the Society of Cardio-thoracic Surgeons are also lining up to support Dhasmana, again driven by the guilt that he has taken the rap for them. The Eye's major contribution to the inquiry was to demonstrate, via high level circulation of the columns in 1992, that senior surgeons such as Keith Ross, Terence English and David Hamilton knew about problems in Bristol and came within a whisker of recommending it be de-designated before chickening out. The department of health sat by and did nothing.

M.D. recently met Martin Elliot, a heart surgeon at Great Ormond Street, who was invited to apply for the chair of cardiac surgery in Bristol in 1991. He declined, deeming the facilities in Bristol to be "inefficient and potentially dangerous", and detailing the lack of specialist staff and split sites. However, the trust management refused to act on this and Wisheart and Dhasmana, neither of whom were specialist paediatric cardiac surgeons, struggled on with the hardest and most demanding surgery despite their evidently poor results. Such is life in the NHS.

Elliot speaks poignantly of the pressures of performing heart surgery in the NHS in 2002, where expectations are higher than ever but working conditions are still appalling and there are dire shortages of specialist staff. Dhasmana has vowed to operate on adults only, but given the added pressure he will be under it might be kinder all round to give him back his pension.

● A new edition of M.D.'s book, *Trust Me, I'm a Doctor*, including an update of the Eye's role at the Bristol Inquiry, is available at the discount price of £8.99 to Eye readers on 020 7381 0666.

M.D.

"It's kill or cure today – we need your bed"

SIGNAL FAILURES

Spads u like, Darling?

MAINTENANCE machines belonging to Railtrack contractors are over-running red signals with astonishing frequency.

The latest official report on signals passed at danger (Spads) describes how a Carillion Rail machine passed a conspicuous red signal at Shrewsbury in April and continued nearly 400 yards. The driver, who had passed a red light once before, was unable to explain why he hadn't noticed the red signal. A "secondman" in the cab had also missed it. "The investigation has exposed apparent weaknesses in Carillion's driver competence management system," concluded the health and safety executive (HSE). It's now pursuing the issue with Carillion, in a move that suggests Railtrack is no longer held responsible for the behaviour of companies it chooses as contractors.

The HSE might have concluded much more from this incident and numerous others. In May Carillion was involved in another Spad, near Mansfield, Notts, when the driver continued for 1,540 yards. In April a Balfour Beatty machine passed a red light at Ladybank, Fife. In March a Jarvis vehicle passed two danger signals in Fife; a First Engineering machine passed a red signal in Manchester by 2,720 yards; and a GTRM machine overshot a red light in Cumbria.

Each of these incidents is rated category three – "serious severity Spads" – and none of the drivers stopped within 200 yards of the signal.

Maintenance machines clock up low mileage but in those three months machines belonging to Railtrack contractors accounted for *one-fifth of all serious Spads* on all railways in Britain (including London Underground). Last year machines operated by Jarvis caused six Spads – more than Midland Mainline or Thameslink whose mileage is exponentially greater.

But new transport secretary Alistair Darling won't let such trifles as Spads get in the way of his doing nothing about the contracting out of maintenance work. As predicted by the *Eye* last month, he has started speaking through his bottom to justify leaving the Tories' crazy rail structure unchanged.

"There always have been subcontractors in the industry," he said last week. "That's not the problem. Rather the problem is that in too many cases not enough attention is being paid to making sure subcontractors do what they are supposed to do."

In fact subcontractors never worked on British Rail's core infrastructure. BR sometimes used contractors to supply specialist items or for basic jobs like painting lampposts under supervision, but contractors were never expected to maintain safety-critical equipment by themselves. Before BR the railways were even more self-sufficient.

Perhaps someone should point out to Darling the impracticality and expense of deploying a Railtrack/Network Rail manager at every worksite on a system of 20,000 track miles and 2,500 stations to keep tabs on 119,000 workers.

'Dr B. Ching'

DOWN ON THE FARM

ON farming matters, the *Times* is bidding to become the most gullible mouthpiece in our national press. On two successive days recently, it led its front page and gave acres of space inside to "stories" it had been spoon fed by shameless spin doctors.

The first, from its Brussels correspondent, purported to reveal how the European Commission (EC) plans "the most radical reform of its £27 billion-a-year farm policy in history". A supposedly "leaked" commission document showed how Brussels plans to switch the bulk of its funding from production subsidies to so-called environmentally-friendly rural development schemes. But there is nothing remotely new about this. The gist of what the *Times* reported has been on the table since 1999, and much of the new system is already in place.

Even more significant was what the *Times* left out. First, it forgot to remind its readers that French farmers already receive £7bn a year in subsidies, three times what British farmers receive. Secondly, it failed to point out that if these proposed reforms are completed, they can only make the plight of British farmers even worse than it is now, because of the trick whereby, under the new system, national governments must match the Brussels contribution on a 50/50 basis.

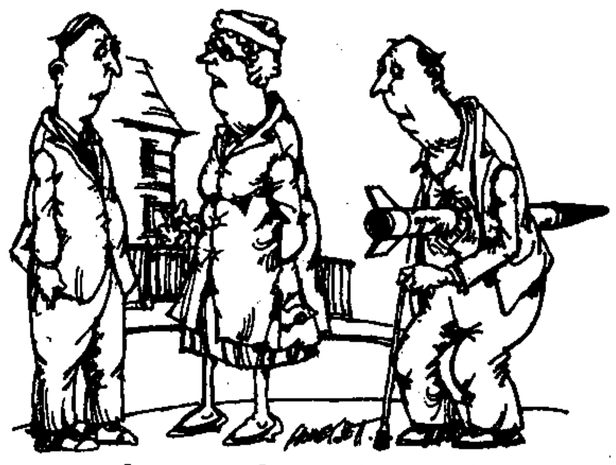
In Britain, thanks to Mrs Thatcher's EU budget rebate, British taxpayers must pay a much higher proportion: 82 percent. And this, as a matter of principle, Gordon Brown and the treasury are highly reluctant to pay. So what the *Times* praises as "the most radical reform in history", (a) has to a large extent already happened; and (b) can only end up putting British farmers at even more of a disadvantage against their competitors than they face already.

Next day the *Times* showed itself even more gullible when it was used by farm minister Elliott Morley to soften up public opinion in advance of the two official reports designed to whitewash his government's performance in last year's foot-and-mouth crisis. "An end to the mass-slaughter" proclaimed the paper's main front-page headline, over a report by Tom Baldwin and Valerie Elliott, based on an exclusive interview with Morley. Britain, they "revealed", will be pressing Brussels for a change of policy to allow it, in any future epidemic, to use vaccination. Morley himself, the interview suggested, wanted to use vaccination last year but was prevented from doing so by an alliance of hidebound farmers and cynical food firms.

Again, this is a travesty. Under existing EU rules the government should have had all the arrangements in place last year to launch a full-scale vaccination programme but had failed to do so. The type of vaccination called for by the scale of the crisis was therefore out of the question. Because the fault lay as much with Brussels as with London, for failing to check whether Britain had the necessary arrangements in place, Brussels and Whitehall closed ranks and tried to keep quiet about how badly they had both cocked-up.

But everyone has long been agreed that such a fiasco must never be repeated. As long ago as March 2001 Brussels commissioner David Byrne indicated that vaccination will be used in any future epidemic. Only the *Times* could be gullible enough to believe Morley when he tries to take credit for "urging Brussels" to adopt a "change in policy" it has already been announcing for more than a year.

'Muckspreader'



"Of course, the army have always denied that the experiments took place"

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

GEE SWIZZ!

THE Snoopers Charter (aka the regulation of investigatory powers act) has been delayed by the introduction of new safeguards. But to judge by the example of Lambeth council, it's doubtful how effective these safeguards will be at preventing councils from abusing their powers to demand email and phone records.

Hitherto local authorities were supposed to act within rules dictated by the data protection act; but in Lambeth the council's former fraudbusting team, led by Jim Gee, acted with scant regard to the "niceties" of the law. Instead it ran checks on unsuspecting and, more importantly, innocent victims (*Eye* 1030).

The *Eye* has now learned of further improper checks carried out by the team. In 1998 Gee's successor Rachel Jones successfully applied to head the corporate anti-fraud team (CAFT) after Gee moved to a post with the NHS. Individuals in CAFT contacted the Benefits Agency to ask if Jones was receiving housing benefit while working.

The information was requested via fax by a "colleague" of hers in CAFT, in contravention of the data protection act, on the basis that it would help "the prevention and detection of crime". Not an iota of evidence ever existed to suggest Jones had done anything wrong and, unsurprisingly, the Benefits Agency said she was not claiming benefit.

In October of the same year another CAFT manager, Nicole McLaughlin, also now working for Gee's NHS outfit, alleged that one of her investigators, Richard Blackmore, was receiving "an essential car users allowance for a vehicle that has been off the road for ages". McLaughlin's allegation was investigated by another manager, Tania Peart, who authorised one of her juniors, Cliff Cowell, to request information on Blackmore's car from the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA).

Cowell made the request to the DVLA on the computer of the deputy head of CAFT, John Ellner, while he was on leave. On returning to work Ellner, a computer buff, soon discovered that the unlawful check had been made on his computer. Apoplectic, he emailed Peart warning her that "should this blow up Cowell could be fined personally £5,000 for what was a blatant abuse", and that "she should never ever allow her staff to go on fishing expeditions and give misleading statements to extract information that is subject to the DPA". Blackmore was duly found to have done nothing wrong. Despite breaching the DPA no action against those responsible followed.

Under the new Snoopers' Charter, "new safeguards" included, the threat of action being taken against those who abuse their power in town halls will diminish further.

HOLE IN THE WALSALL

DEPUTY prime minister John Prescott's office is considering whether to sack 10 senior managers at Tory-LibDem run Walsall council. Their posts would be filled by private sector consultants.

The plan follows a damning audit commission report which revealed financial problems were plaguing the council. Its education service also came under fire from Ofsted for failing the area's vulnerable youngsters.

So how has Walsall knuckled down to overcome these problems? Well, it has spent £18,000 on a glossy 10-page supplement in the *Municipal Journal* in which chief executive Hardial Bhogal assures readers everything is tickety-boo at the crisis-hit council.

THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT

MORE from Durham's Gala Theatre where liquidators were called in two weeks after the Queen had completed the official opening (*Eye* 1056). Entertainment Team, the company hired by the council to run the theatre, went bust and liquidators have now revealed the extent of the damage.

The firm had accumulated almost £700,000 of debt, £209,000 of this being council (and therefore taxpayers') money. Alan Marlor, liquidator for Entertainment Team, said the company directors lacked the credentials to run the theatre and criticised the council for choosing them. He revealed that Entertainment Team's only financial contribution to the venture was supplying the kitchen equipment.

Creditors, including Northern Opera, are now teetering on the brink of closure. They've been told they are unlikely to get back their money.

BURY DISAPPOINTING

BURY's "old" Labour councillors have angered locals with their plans to close four old folks' homes, announced only days after the May local elections.

The council blames government policy and financial constraints — but this is a town hall that notoriously threw away £6m in the great BCCI fiasco.

By a curious symmetry Bury now plans to spend another £6m on a grand folly: a unique "market museum" scheme in the ailing mill town of Radcliffe. Pleas from traders that having a six-day market is daft when there isn't enough business for the current three days, have fallen on deaf ears and the plan is going ahead.

Bury's grasp of finance can be judged from its £50,000 sponsorship of the town's football club which is in administration and has now sunk back to the third division. The club is known as The Shakers, unlike the council whose members are known locally as The Plonkers.

I-SPY *Paris*

Submitted by Bruce Hammal. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

MARTY PANTS

MARTIN Winter, bumptious mayor of Donnygate, smirks triumphantly at voters from a recent edition of the *Doncaster News*. He uses the free sheet to boast of his "ambitious" , "busy" and "challenging" agenda which features all the usual suspects of education, crime reduction, social care and economic development.

Sadly for the poor folk of the borough, by the time the paper hit the streets home secretary David Blunkett had nicked 30 South Yorkshire coppers from their Donny beat to boost his crime prevention initiatives in Sheffield. Winter said nothing.

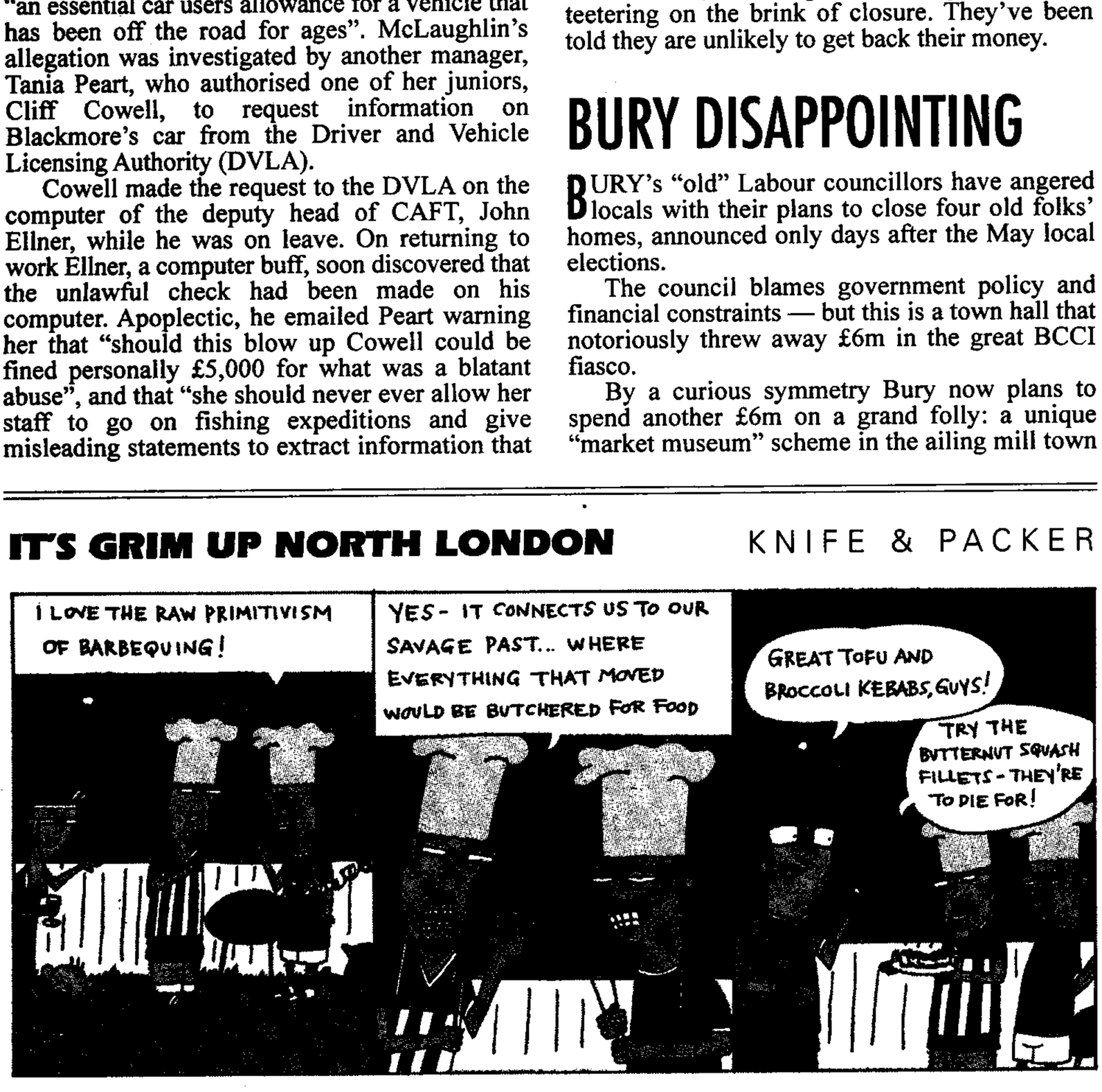
Then a care crisis provoked by the council's parsimony reduced provision for the elderly, who went on to see their meals on wheels service being withdrawn.

Winter's concern for education was put into perspective when it was revealed that he had paid a mere £90,000 for consultants to come up with an "educashun master plan", measured against the £857,000 he and his cronies coughed up for Race Course consultants.

Winter has managed to deliver in one area under his jurisdiction. Page 3 of the propaganda sheet lavishes praise on "Doncaster's Green Revolution", a recycling scheme called Kerbside Collections and funded by the council to the tune of £679,000.

Despite all this cash, there was a crisis a couple of months into the scheme which required a further £70,000 emergency funding. Hidden away in accounts is a payment of £149,000 for "Raising Awareness" made out to the Glass Park Company [prop: Martin Winter, see *Eyes passim*]. On the books as project coordinator is Caroline Hunter [aka Mrs Martin Winter]. And on Page 5 is a piece about crowds flocking to a "Farmers' Market", a scheme also lavishly supported by the council, run by a company called DoLFN, which is yet another satellite of the Glass Park, again run by Winter. This farmers' market undermines the existing market, which was one of Donny's economic jewels — but who cares? Mart's doing very nicely, it seems.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER


I LOVE THE RAW PRIMITIVISM OF BARBEQUING!
YES - IT CONNECTS US TO OUR SAVAGE PAST... WHERE EVERYTHING THAT MOVED WOULD BE BUTCHERED FOR FOOD
GREAT TOFU AND BROCCOLI KEBABS, GUYS!
TRY THE BUTTERNUT SQUASH FILLETS - THEY'RE TO DIE FOR!

NOOKS and CORNERS

IT IS not only in England that the government's planning inspectorate cheerfully overturns sound planning refusals on appeal when they disoblige developers (*Eyes passim*). The same seems to be happening in Northern Ireland.

In *Eye* 1034 I discussed the proposal to build a block of flats within the curtilage of a listed building and at the entrance to the grounds of Stormont. This was opposed by Belfast city council and local residents and ought anyway to have been ruled out under the 1931 legislation which ostensibly protects the landscaped grounds and environs of the Northern Ireland parliament building.

But far from being dead the project is insidiously alive: the Environment & Heritage Service has made no objection while, just as the case is being referred to the planning appeals commission, the department of the environment has said it is minded to give planning permission.

Now it may well be that the Stormont parliament building — a monumental Classical pile in Portland stone dating from 1927-32 and designed by Sir Arnold Thornely to look like the capitol of some Mid-Western state – presents quite the wrong image for any future Northern Irish assembly. It was indeed a product of the Protestant ascendancy after the partition of Ireland – although similar associations did not prevent the government buildings at New Delhi (on which the axial planning of Stormont was clearly modelled) being taken over successfully after Indian independence in 1947. But that is not the point. The point is that the buildings are architecturally distinguished and form the centrepiece of a planned and harmonious open landscape which ought to be protected under the planning archaeology and built heritage legislation for Northern Ireland.

The visitors' entrance to Stormont is in Massey Avenue and was carefully designed by Thornely, who was also responsible for the adjacent former Provincial Bank of 1932 – a listed building. It is in the grounds of the bank – 33 Massey Avenue – that MAR Properties first applied to build 12 flats, then six, and now a tall block of three flats.

Reducing the size has not improved the design; it is still higher than the old bank and, in the words of the redoubtable Professor James Stevens Curl, "the feeble designs submitted" – by anonymous architects – "pay no regard whatsoever to the character of the listed building, its axes, or the site as a whole."

The proposal is opposed by some ministers and MLAs and 156 letters of objection from local residents have been lodged (with none in favour). The fear is that, if the development is allowed, a precedent will be set for the area. It was on these grounds that an earlier proposal to build a mere house at the rear of 32 Massey Avenue was turned down.

What is so special, one cannot help wondering, about MAR Properties in the eyes of the government's planning officials based in Belfast, which is hoping to be chosen as European City of Culture.

ANOTHER unfashionable monumental Classical public building is the old County Hall by the Thames – oddly enough designed by Ralph Knott who collaborated with Thornely on Stormont. It was of course the headquarters of "Red" Ken Livingstone's Greater London Council until that body was abolished by Margaret Thatcher.

Later this month Ken, now the London mayor, will move into brand new corporate headquarters downstream on the South Bank: City Hall, the new home of the Greater London Assembly.

It remains incomprehensible that, on returning to power in 1997, Labour did not simply compulsorily purchase County Hall as, on its magnificent site, it had been paid for by the ratepayers of London. But "new" Labour likes new buildings so, just as it imposed the pretentious new Scottish parliament on Edinburgh, a flashy new building was requested for the new London assembly even before the assembly had convened to decide what building it wanted. A secretive limited competition was organised by Nick Raynsford and won by Norman Foster – the only surprise being that the winner was not Richard Rogers.

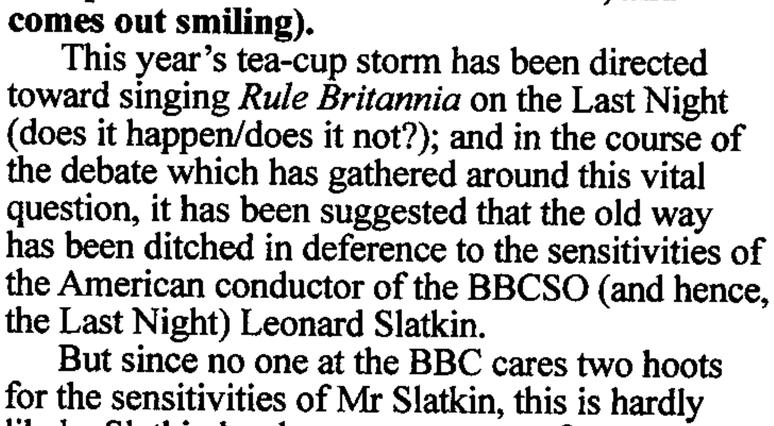
Curiously, the structure which will be opened by the Queen is not the winning concept resembling a huge headlamp with a giant lens facing the river. It is now more like a wonky jelly-mould with a series of curved floors lurching away from the Thames. So much for the "competition".

Inside is a feature reused from Foster's Berlin Reichstag: an extravagant corkscrew pedestrian circulation ramp which, because it is stepped, cannot be used by disabled people. But never mind; as this second-rate, gimmicky gesture is another "masterpiece" by Milord Norman, it will be enthusiastically acclaimed by the sycophantic architectural press.

'Piloti'

101 Uses for a City Hall

Hot-Air Fan Heater



MUSIC & MUSICIANS

EVERY year the prospect of the Proms heralds a spot of modest, manageable controversy, usually generated by Proms supremo Nicholas Kenyon himself in the effort to get on to the *Today* programme (where he is interrogated with a feather by James Naughtie, who presents the Proms for television, and comes out smiling).

This year's tea-cup storm has been directed toward singing *Rule Britannia* on the Last Night (does it happen/does it not?); and in the course of the debate which has gathered around this vital question, it has been suggested that the old way has been ditched in deference to the sensitivities of the American conductor of the BBCSO (and hence, the Last Night) Leonard Slatkin.

But since no one at the BBC cares two hoots for the sensitivities of Mr Slatkin, this is hardly likely. Slatkin has become a person of no consequence with the corporation since his orchestra decided it didn't like him. Within months of his arrival in 2001, BBCSO players made it clear to their management they had no respect for his musicianship, complaining that he was slapdash and that they deserved someone of higher calibre.

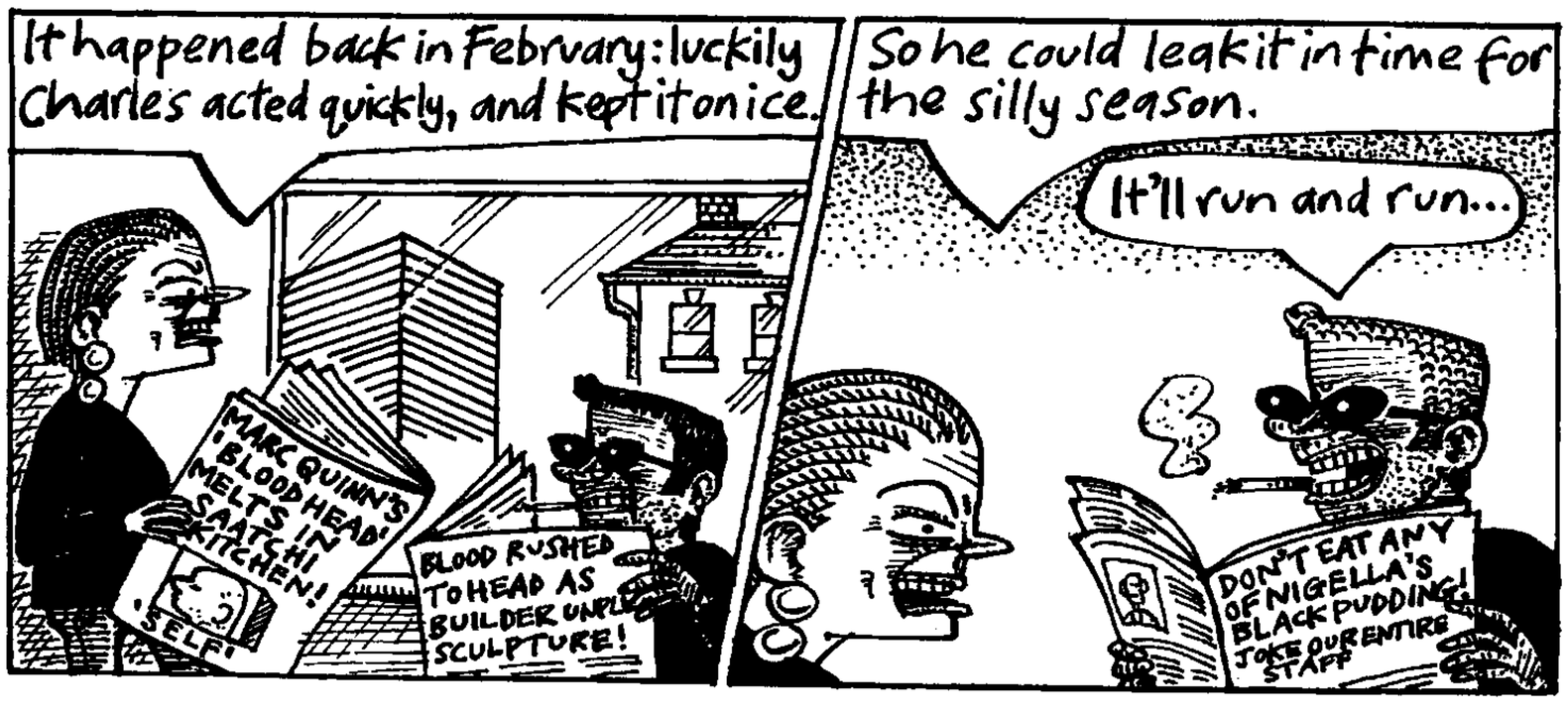
At the same time they began to make his life difficult – as only orchestral players know how – with the result that he has now given notice of his intention to leave, with just one single Proms season under his belt. The only other conductor to have lasted so short a time with the BBC was Rudolf Kempe, and that's because he died.

In all the circumstances this will be a difficult Proms season for the wretched Slatkin who, one notes, gets zero profile in the Proms guide (not so much as a mention in Nicholas Kenyon's upfront listing of the season's highlights) and will be carving through his five contractually allocated concerts in the knowledge (a) that BBC managers are busily searching for someone to replace him and (b) that his orchestra is counting the days until that someone arrives.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH


It happened back in February: luckily Charles acted quickly, and kept it on ice.
So he could leak it in time for the silly season.
It'll run and run...
MARC QUINN'S 'BLOOD HEAD' MELTS IN SAATCHI KITCHEN!
'SELF'
BLOOD RUSHED TO HEAD AS BUILDER UNPL SCULPTURE!
DON'T EAT ANY OF NIGELLA'S BLACK PUDDING! JOKE OUR ENTIRE STAFF

Warballs

"This is the first of the Jazz Journalists' Association Jazz Matters discussions, produced in conjunction with the New School Jazz and Contemporary Music Program… We originally intended this to be the third week of September but everybody knows that there's been sort of a shaking up process in New York City since 11 September and we delayed until now to try to focus on questions of how jazz reacted to – how people in the jazz world reacted to the attacks at the World Trade Center… The evidence was that those of us constantly involved with jazz, professionally, gravitated towards some sort of jazz activity fairly quickly."

— Howard Mandel, president of Jazz Journalists' Association, at a discussion on "Jazz Matters: How and Why, in Wake of Events of 11 September".

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

A CHORUS of media praise greeted home secretary David Blunkett's announcement that his "snoopers' charter" was a blunder and would be withdrawn. At last, the pundits observed admiringly, the government had shown itself prepared to listen to public opinion. But was the story all it seemed?

MPs and ministers had been bombarded with protests from citizens alarmed at the idea that outfits such as the food standards agency (FSA) would have access to our emails and text messages as part of the war on terrorism. (Actually, the proposal would have increased the number of public bodies able to access "comms data", ie the records of whom we are emailing, phoning and texting – but *not* the contents of these messages, which can only be accessed through a warrant signed by the home secretary.) But quite apart from the arguments about civil liberties – and the "procedural problems" in getting the legislation through the Lords – ministers must have known that it made no technological sense whatever.

Suppose that a pair of British-based terrorists wish to communicate with each other without being caught. To avoid landlines, they could buy (with cash) a pair of unregistered pay-as-you-go mobile phones. These are untraceable and totally anonymous and hence highly popular with the criminal community. But even mobile calls can be traced using a scanner – provided you have a good idea where and when the call is being made. What then for our putative terrorists?

They can, of course, turn to the internet. Now, while it is true that emails can be intercepted between PC and exchange, this is only the case when the service provider is British-based. It is unlikely that the writ of the food standards agency runs in, say, the offices of AOL or Wanadoo (the main French internet portal). Besides, once the message has been let loose on the net, it is basically uncatchable.

Let us assume terrorist A lives in Liverpool and wishes to send a message to terrorist B in Leeds. Because of the way the net is structured, the message is sent configured under Internet Protocol (IP). The sentence "let's bomb the dome" will be broken up into small packets of information that wing their way around the globe, automatically finding the paths of least resistance. Bits of the message may find themselves in San Francisco or Tokyo before being routed back to Yorkshire.

To make life even easier for themselves, the terrorists will use a laptop connected to a pay-as-you-go mobile phone, and an anonymous email account with Hotmail, Yahoo or whoever. Furthermore, they could encrypt the message using proprietary software. Of course, if you throw enough money at the problem – and a great deal of international cooperation involving the likes of Microsoft – even these messages can be intercepted. But nothing in the proposed legislation would have made this more likely to happen.

'Boffin'

"OK, you can either retire, or become ironic"

Letters

Private Eye

Maths doesn't add up

Sir,

It is very hard to believe the assertion in Educashun Newz (Eye 1057) that the AS level in maths is proving too hard. The questions nowadays are becoming much easier than previously – ludicrously so, in fact.

I have been trying to press the point of view that maths is actually a "hard" subject, in the sense that a particular type of concentration and general "awareness" is required for it – characteristics that are hard to maintain given the financial straits of students nowadays.

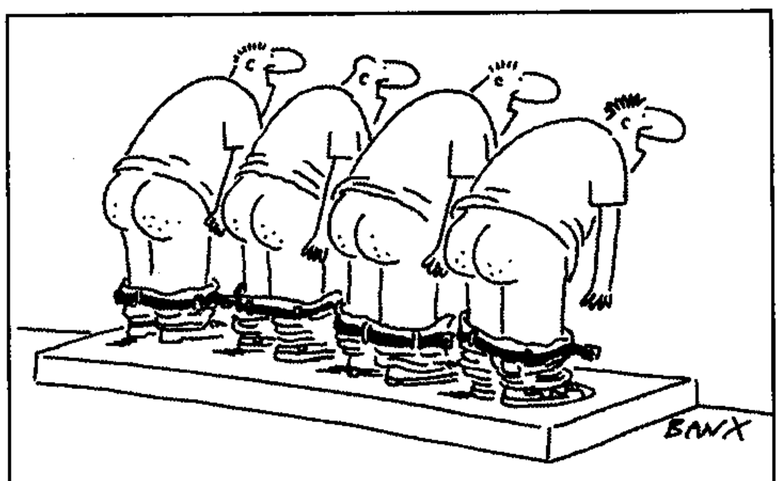
This is the way I feel anyway – I personally consider it ironic that I could have received higher grades and now be on a higher income, if I had studied another subject than maths, despite maths being far-and-away my best subject. In fact by way of illustration, I have recently been awarded a BA in German after part-time study as an extended "hobby", something I would never have been able to do in mathematics.

I most certainly would never actively encourage anyone to study maths at university. It might be stretching a point to say that schools students are failing and losing interest in maths because of the facts of university finances – if we are to look for any causal reasons, then what about the lack of maths teachers and the consequent lower teaching standards in this subject? This could then also be consistent with my "theory" on the effects of zero grants.

I don't think the maths community itself will be over-enthusiastic about sorting the problem out. A lot of them will feel very happy with their ability to understand a subject that others are having problems with – they will be as willing as any other "elite" to destroy their own "elite" status.

BRIAN DAUGHERTY,

Mathematics Dept, Portsmouth University.



Greek Identity Parade

England balls

Sir,

Time and again, you demonstrate a clear lack of understanding regarding "The Beautiful Game" in the Colemanballs/Worldcupballs segment. I feel that I must defend the likes of King Sven when he says "Football is much harder if you don't have the ball."

This is clearly a reference to England's inability to keep possession for any period in excess of five seconds, and as such, not a comment that deserves to be held up as testament to the idiocy of all those connected with football. After all, it IS much harder to play against the likes of Brazil when you keep giving them the ball by hoofing it endlessly upfield to the diminutive Michael Owen, since you then have to spend five minutes trying win it back again.

However, the rest of the column was, as usual, superb. Apologies for my pedantry.

TED FORSYTH,

Via email.

Profit and loss

Sir,

Shareholders in Vodafone have seen a loss of £130bn (and even more after today's debacle following the WorldCom shock, horror), not million, as shown in your chart.

Using the same scale to show the shareholders' loss, against Sir Chris Gent's ill-gotten gains of the last two years, would require a piece of paper 54 metres long (174 feet in old money).

Yours faithfully,
P. BARNARD,

Via email.

Lookalike

Nike

Thatcher

Sir,

Have any of your readers noticed the similarity between the statue of Baroness Thatcher, raised to mark the triumph of market-driven Thatcherism, and the famous Nike, or Victory, of Samothrace sculpture, raised in the north Aegean in 190BC to promote a mass market brand of running sandal?

Yours,
ENA B. BOOKER,

London W1.

Pistol packer

Sir,

Re: EMI oh my (Letters, 1057).

Rod Parkes incorrectly stated that EMI dropped the Pistols because of the furore surrounding the release of God Save The Queen – not so! EMI had dropped them after releasing Anarchy In The UK (their first single) due to media attention of the SP's infamous antics on Bill Grundy's Today show.

A&M subsequently signed them in March '77 and pressed the GSTQ single only to sack the band within a week and destroy all bar a few dozen copies of the single creating an instant rarity (worth upwards of £500).

The single only ever saw the light of day when they signed to Virgin in May the same year.

The single achieved the dizzy heights of #2 (or #1 depending who you ask!) the week of the Silver Jubilee – not bad considering it had no airplay (banned!) and the big retailers refused to stock it!

STEVE BLACK

Via email.

Bar on cartoons

Sir,

Re Yobs cartoon, Eye 1057.

I challenge you to find any Private Eye reader who didn't celebrate their 18th birthday at their favourite boozer. And I'm sure a lot of them made Ben's mistake of telling the landlord what birthday it was. What's yobbish about that?

Please – ask Tony Husband to stick to mindless violence, ignorance and sexism. That's what we pay our money to read about.

Yours,
KEN WILSON,

London.

Scenes You Seldom See (14)

"I'll call you back – this conversation is really annoying people"

Ad nausea

Sir,

On page 26 of issue 1057 there is an excellent article detailing the staff relations (or lack of them) at Cathay Pacific. On page 31 of the same issue is a full page advertisement for... Cathay Pacific!

Yours,
SHAUN WILLIAMS,
Chippenham.

Out by air miles

Sir,

John Warham's letter to the Sunday Times regarding my tenure at Cathay Pacific (In the Back, Eye 1057) actually had BA to do with the truth.

The "Operation Better Shape" referred to did not involve the loss of a single job at Cathay Pacific. It was a business practice review, not a jobs axing programme. Many of the 49 Cathay Pacific pilots who sadly lost their jobs last year probably don't know me from Adam – I left Cathay Pacific in 1996. In my book, that doesn't even count as a near miss.

Cheers,
R.I. EDDINGTON,
Chief Executive, British Airways.

Tax debate

Sir,

I am all for your continuing campaign to expose the devious practices of tax avoiders, and hopefully to get some of the loopholes closed. I was therefore somewhat puzzled to see a full page advertisement in your magazine (1057, page 32) for a company specialising in tax "reduction" and "deferral" who claim that "if there is a legal way to reduce your tax bill we will find it". Are you against tax avoidance, or are you happy to cash-in by carrying advertisements for it? I don't think the two are mutually compatible.

Yours etc,
ROBIN PETHERBRIDGE,
Via email.

Yes minister, no secretary

Sir,

Chris Austin (Letters, 1057) exclaims surprise about HP Sauce's reference to "Home Secretary" Jack Straw. He should not be: in Eye 1055 HP revealed that William Waldegrave was a "former Tory Foreign Secretary". I never knew that – and I was his private secretary for six months. I could have sworn that he was health secretary. I guess we civil servants just don't have Sauce's sources.

COLIN PHILLIPS,
Via email.

● *Apologies. Waldegrave is a former Tory Foreign Office minister, not secretary, of state.*

E for error

Sir,

If you are going to carry articles about the chairman of the Inland Revenue (In the Back, 1057), please get his surname right.

Yours faithfully,
RICHARD MONTAGU,
Via email.

Illegal immigrants

Sir,

I liked your cartoon on page 21 of Eye 1056. However the idea of Viking raiders being confronted on the beach by an immigration officer may not be entirely fanciful since the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle contains the following entry for the year 787.

"In this year, King Beorthric (of Wessex) took to wife Eadburh, daughter of Offa. And in his days came first three ships of Norseman from Hörthaland: and the reeve rode thither and tried to compel them to go to the royal manor, for he did not know what they were: and they slew him."

Yours sincerely,
A.J. WELTON,
St Albans.

Splitting hairs

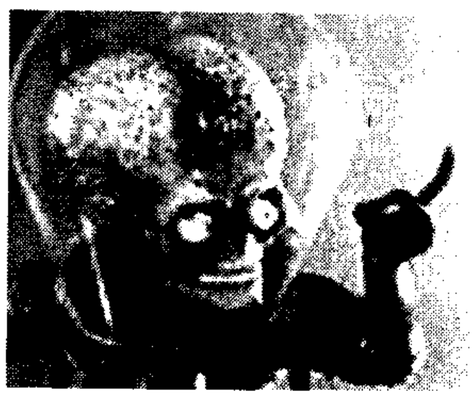
Sir,

Please! No more "fine tooth-combs" (The mystery of Orwell's millions, Eye 1057) As any fule kno, it's "fine-tooth(ed) comb".

Doh! I know, I should seek therapy...

STEVE VERDIER,
Via email.

Lookalike



Referee

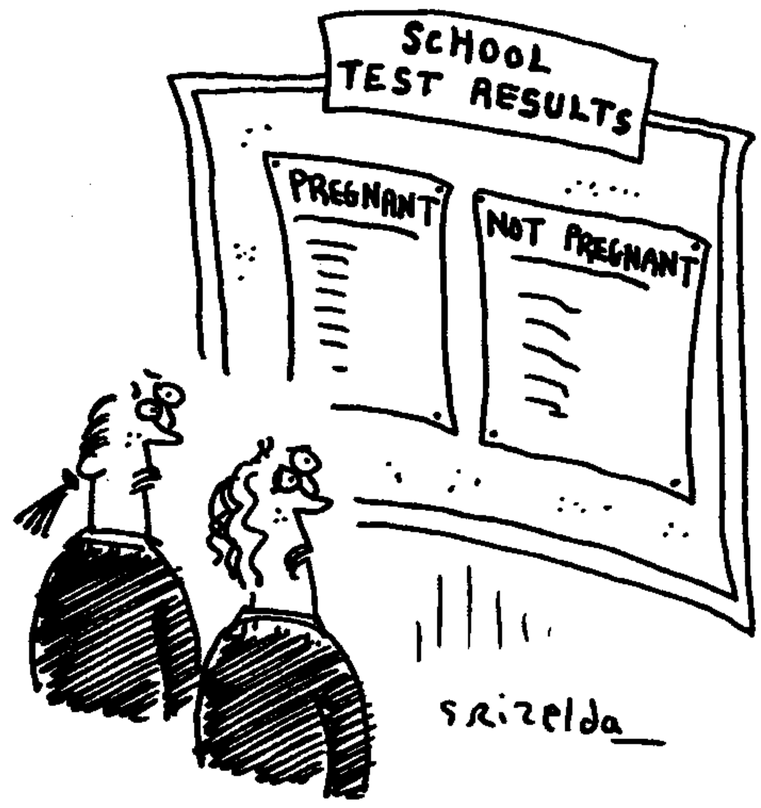
Martian

Sir,

Have any of your readers noticed the similarity between Pierluigi Collina, FIFA's appointed World Cup Final 2002 referee and Italian pin-up, and the dastardly Martian Ambassador from Mars Attack! *who opened fire on army and civilians alike at the greeting ceremony in the Nevada desert?*

I think we should tell the Koreans. And the Italians and Spanish.

Yours,
MARK FIELDING,
Singapore.



LUVVIES

"Acting is not about the money, although people find that hard to believe. Ten years ago I would have arguments with friends about 'Give me bohemia or give me death', and they thought I was crazy. And I have gone all over the world with my art because there are people who respect and only want to work with that kind of person."

RUSSELL CROWE
Sunday Times Magazine

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Wimbleballs

£10 paid for contributions

"Here we see Andre Sa, who, never having won a competitive match, has reached the Wimbledon quarter-final."
JOHN McENROE, BBC
(Colin Farquhar)

"Andre Sa is playing close to his potential – maybe even above it."
BORIS BECKER, BBC
(Andrew Wastall)

"It's been predictable, in the sense 'expect the unexpected'..."
JOHN McENROE, BBC
(Daniel Stanton)

"He has great pressure on his shoulders internally."
Commentator, Radio 5 Live
(John Friary)

"I do sympathise with the problem of the net when you're hitting a volley. It's a real obstacle in the middle of the court."
VIRGINIA WADE, BBC
(Liz Brooks)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

WHY SO CHEERFUL, BRUTUS. MAXIMUS WILL CUT YOU TO BITS.
I DON'T CARE. I'LL BE LOADED.
I'VE BET £500 ON HIM TO WIN.
THE BIG FIGHT
MAXIMUS V. BRUTUS

Letter from **New Delhi**

from Our Own Correspondent

A DELICIOUS irony surrounds the efforts of western countries trying to avert conflict between India and Pakistan. All the while they are queuing to sell the two nuclear rivals military hardware worth billions of dollars.

Led by the US and its close ally Britain, France and Russia have recently launched diplomatic offensives to stop New Delhi and Islamabad going to war. Their leaders spared little effort at shuttle and phone diplomacy in trying to ease the tension over Kashmir, which they have declared a "nuclear flashpoint" and one of the world's most dangerous trouble spots.

Paradoxically, the military machines of these very countries are either already supplying India or Pakistan – or both – a variety of military goods, or negotiating desperately for access to the world's largest arms market.

The US took the lead in this new form of creative diplomacy, otherwise known as collective hypocrisy, when it signed a $146m deal with Delhi as more than a million Indian and Pakistani soldiers were locked in a stand-off along the 3,200km frontier backed by armour, missiles and artillery. The Bush administration has approved another 20 "big ticket" military items for sale to India; and Pakistan has been told unofficially by Washington that "low key" military sales will resume shortly.

You in Britain have already sent your defence secretary Geoffrey Hoon to Delhi via Islamabad, ostensibly to lower tension but in reality to close the deal for 66 BAE Systems Hawk training aircraft worth more than £1bn. Hoon is just the latest British minister to come here touting peace but actually trying to sell us the outdated trainer with one of the world's highest accident rates.

Your foreign secretary Jack Straw was one who talked up the seriousness of the situation in the subcontinent back in May, raising the prospect of nuclear armageddon. But away from his domestic audience and on a trip to Delhi last month, he was quick to refute news reports from London that Britain had imposed an arms embargo on India and opposed the sale of Hawk trainers. The confusion, he explained, arose from a senior Labour party leader speaking out of turn.

It was the second time this year he had pitched for the Hawk deal, after similar efforts on behalf of BAE Systems (a company in trouble and facing lay-offs) by Hoon and Tony Blair himself. Even Sir Kevin Tebbit, permanent under-secretary in your defence ministry, has been over to lead a delegation to further "strategic dialogue" between our two great nations.

We must seem a soft touch. After all, an ailing AB Bofors was saved when we bought 400 howitzers; and it was India again that helped UK's Westland avoid closure when we acquired 21 helicopters in the mid-1980s. It's incidental that the Bofors kickback scandal is still under investigation and the inefficient Westland-30s, bought for £60m, were sold recently as scrap having lain around in crates for nearly a decade waiting for a bidder.

Russia, still our arms supplier of choice, is also in on the game, generously offering to broker an India-Pakistan peace summit while finding time to finalise a deal with us for an aircraft carrier and the leasing of two nuclear-powered submarines.

Nor is France to be left out. It is on the verge of signing an £840m contract to build six "killer" submarines, besides bidding for the propulsion system for the navy's locally designed aircraft carrier. India has also opened preliminary discussions to acquire more than 100 French Mirage 2005 fighter aircraft. Remember, it was France that chose to mark India's decision to carry out nuclear tests four years ago by openly strengthening military cooperation when other powers at least went through the motions of expressing of concern. Can pay day be far away?

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "The biggest problem comes when the Karamajong warriors go on drinking sessions," Walter Ochero told reporters in Kotido (north-east Uganda), "because that's when they have most trouble with the zippers. When they get drunk, some of them fail completely to remove their trousers when they want to go to pass piss, and they end up soiling themselves, after trying to unroll the trousers down their legs in order to pass piss and stool. This is complicated clothing that they're now being ordered to wear, and it's not fair to confuse them like this."

Ochero was speaking after a new dress code had been imposed on Karamajong warriors by Colonel Sula Semakula of the UPDF (the Ugandan army). "Traditionally, Haramajong men wear a Suka, or cloth wrap-around. But the army accused them of using the Suka to conceal weapons, and imposed a dress code on them, forcing them to wear trousers whenever they come to town. But most of the warriors have never worn pants or shorts before, and although they're complying with the ban as best as they can, they're not happy about it. The fasteners frustrate them when they want to answer a call of nature, and many of them now have painful zip burn injuries, as well as lacerations, and blisters on their thighs. And many groups of Karamajong in remote areas are completely trouserless, and complain that they cannot get into town to buy a pair, because the UPDF won't let them past the road blocks if they're wearing a Suka. We are thinking of ways around this. A square flap over the groin area, fastened with Velcro, is being considered." *(The New Vision, 27/5/02. Spotter: Jeff Thompson)*

— ● —

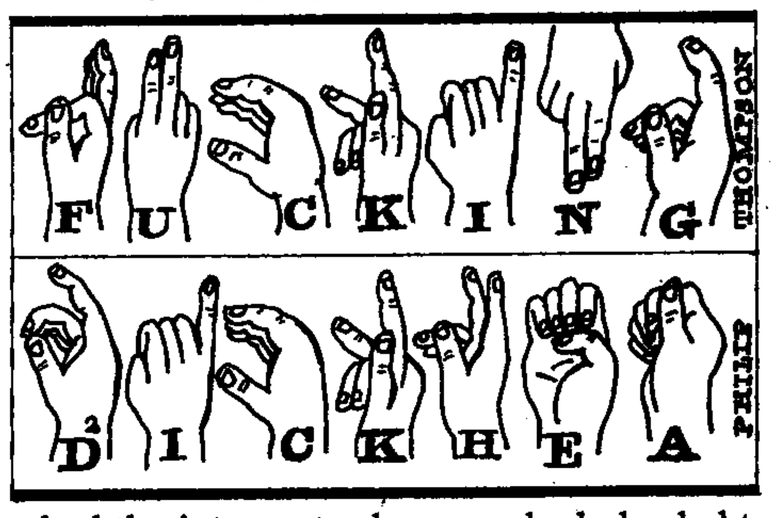
● *"A fractured penis is a urological emergency," Dr Ahmed Shamsudini told a press conference at the Hamad Medical Corporation in Doha, "resulting from a tear in the tissue layers of the penis. Our study has shown that this condition is usually due to forceful manipulation of the penis, and that the overwhelming majority of patients suffering from it in Qatar are bachelors, living alone."*

Introducing his study, entitled Fractured Penis – The Qatar Experience, *Dr Shamsudini explained that the penis is composed of three cylinder-like structures (corpora) covered by deep and superficial fascia (sheaths). "The corpora fill with blood during erection, thus converting the soft structure into a hard one. The main cause of fracture is vigorous bending and forceful manipulation of an erect penis, and all the patients we examined reported hearing a click at the moment of rupture, followed by pain and swelling. Some patients claimed that the fracture had been caused by turning in bed with an erection while sleeping, but this seems highly unlikely to me.*

"Let me emphasise that a fractured penis is considered an emergency situation in urology, and that the patient should seek medical help immediately. During our follow-up enquiries, we found that most patients made a full recovery, and that married men seldom seem to experience fractured penises. With them, the overwhelming problem is impotence." (The Peninsula [Qatar], 13/5/02. Spotter: J.M. Montgomery)

— ● —

● "It's bad enough that you were involved in a brawl," Magistrate Ron Kilner told Peter Spriggs, 42, while sentencing him in his court in Southport, Queensland, "but your behaviour before me today has been even more disgraceful. As you are profoundly deaf, I agreed to your solicitor's request to allow you to use sign language in this court. But when I



asked the interpreter how you had pleaded to the charges of disorderly conduct at the Gold Coast surf club, she translated your reply, after some embarrassment, as 'the judge is a fucking dickhead' . After you had also signed to her that I was an asshole, and a cocksucker, I sent you to the cells for a few hours, to reconsider your behaviour. But when you were called back, you signed to your interpreter that I was a loss to the road-sweeping profession, a fat bastard, and more boring than a pneumatic drill, and what is more, you still refuse to withdraw the insults. Your solicitor has claimed that your hands have Tourette Syndrome, but I think you know full well what they're saying. And I therefore have no alternative but to sentence you to two weeks in jail for contempt, and fine you $140 for the brawl." *(Brisbane Courier and Mail, 25/5/02. Spotter: Norm Reynolds)*

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo (if that doesn't sound too 'smug'!)

I was told this week by Mr Gould that according to his researches round the parish, 62 percent of you think that is what I am – smug!

Let's just think about that, shall we? That figure means that 62 percent of you are wrong! And of course 38 percent of you are right in thinking that I am *not* smug!

So quite a few of you have got some hard thinking to do, to catch up with the 38 percent who know what they are talking about!

And even if I did happen to be smug, which I am not, wouldn't I have quite a lot to be smug about?

Let's just look at some of the things I could be very smug about if I wanted to.

1. Not being smug.
2. Really improving the quality of life for everyone in the parish in a very real way.
3. Having more women, gays and black people on the PCC than ever before. And doesn't that make a difference?
4. Introducing a whole raft of initiatives across the board in a pro-active way, to improve the quality of life for everyone in the parish.
5. Not making the same announcements twice in slightly different ways in the hope of fooling people, like some of my predecessors used to do.

So there are just a few points for you all to be thinking about.

And any of you who heard my recent question and answer session with one of my toughest critics, my good friend Mr Snow of our local Hospital radio service, know just how unsmug I can be when it comes to pointing out how well we've done!

As the extract below shows, Mr Snow really pulled no punches, which is why I thought long and hard before deciding to invite him round the vicarage to interview me.

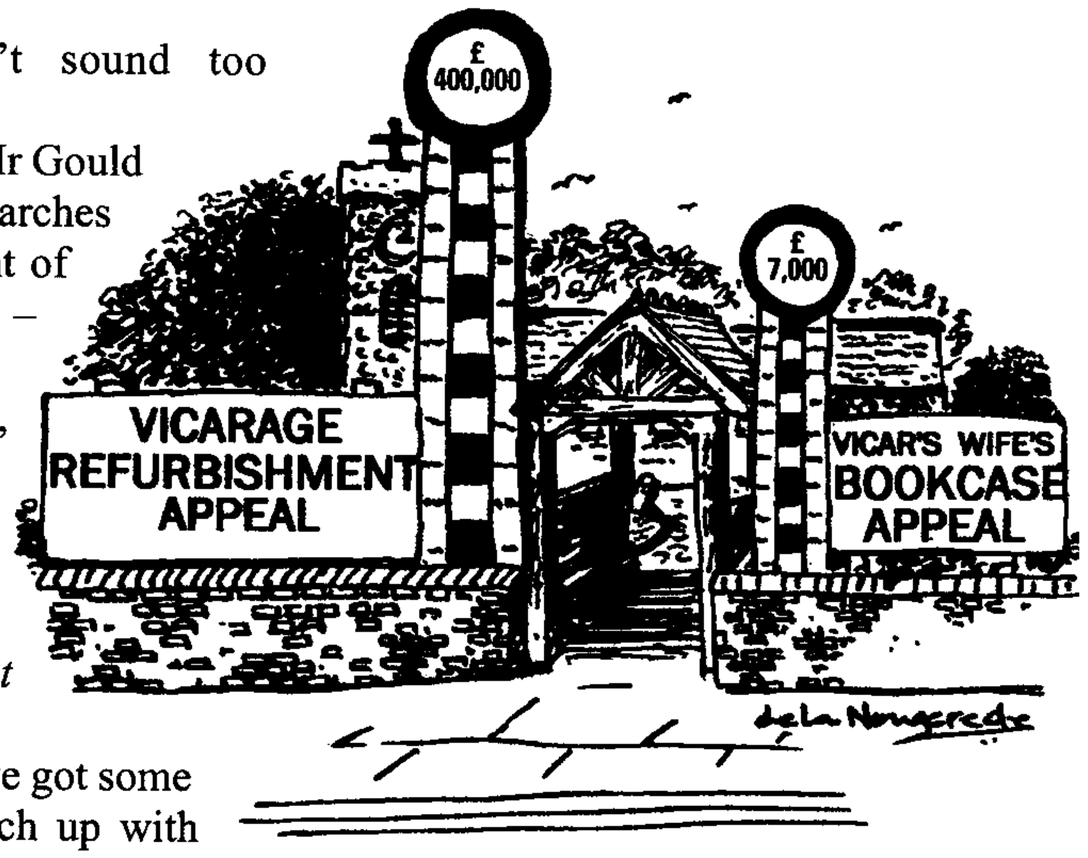
Mr Snow: *Vicar, it is tremendously good of you to give up your valuable time to explain to our listeners how successful you have been in reforming the parish since you came here in 1997.*

Rev. T. Blair: *That's a tough one, Jon!*

Snow: *I haven't asked the question yet!*

TB: *Sorry but, look, I know the sort of question you're going to ask, and, hey, that's your job, nothing wrong with that!*

Snow: *Ha, ha, ha. May I call you Tony?*



TB: *Certainly, Jon, you always do normally when we have dinner together!*

I think that brief extract gives you all a real taste of the grilling I got from Jon. I can tell you, I knew what it must have been like for Daniel when he was thrown into that lion's den!

But I am sure that any of you who heard the interview will realise that I got the better of Mr Snow, and showed that I am in no way 'smug'.

So let's see that figure of 62 percent coming right down, shall we, when Mr Gould next goes round the parish with his clipboard!

Yours Tony

Advertisement

State School Parents!!

Now you too can stick to your principles and still get private school-style results for your kids!

Westminster tutors will send top private sector teachers round to your home (or vicarage!) to give your 6th form sons and daughters the very best education money can buy!

Says Mrs Cherie B, "My boy is soon off to Oxford, thanks to the Westminster." So ring us today. "We teach, you pay."

FULL DISCRETION GUARANTEED.

Parish Postbag

Dear Vicar,

You may remember I was once married to the organist Mr Cook. In my job as district psychiatric nurse I have come to the conclusion that you, personally, are to blame for the appalling

Yours faithfully,
Mrs Margaret Cook,
Flat 57b, The Hell Fury Estate.

The editor reserves the right to cut letters by mad menopausal women who attack the vicar in a pathetic attempt to get their own back on their ex-husbands. A.C.

To Remember In Your Prayers (Again)

● Mr Livingstone, who has had another very unhappy week. As if it wasn't bad enough him being found drunk and disorderly and beating up a single soon-to-be-mother at a party, he is now single-handedly trying to wipe out the children of the parish by telling their parents not to vaccinate them against killer diseases such as MMR. Let us pray that Ken will continue to remain excommunicated from our church and punished in the hereafter! T.B.

A Message From Our Good Friend The Rev. Dubya Bush, of the Church of the Latter Day Morons

Greetings to y'all in little old St Abigails and mah very good friend Tony Bloom. My message this week is that it's time to turn our good friends the moneylenders out of the temple. Those who worship the god Mammon have brought shame on all the decent God-fearing business folk of our land. One minute they are telling us they are our friends and showering gifts upon us, like my friend Mr N. Ron. And the next they're in gaol trying to embarrass me and to bring me down. I say to all such folks, "Get thee behind me, Satan, and thanks for all the donations. God bless America."

SPECIAL OFFER!!

For just £9.99 you can buy this SPECIAL JUBILEE COMMEMORATIVE MUG to help the world's poorest.

Tony's Not Smug Mug

1p from each mug goes to Mrs Short's "Save Africa" Appeal.

Daily Look-In-The-Mirror

WET WIMP LOSES YET AGAIN

by TIM HENMAN

HOW PATHETIC! Yet another summer goes by and we have to witness another dismal display by the so-called great hope of British journalism, Piers Morman.

There is only one word to describe his shockingly bad performance against the world's number one tabloid editor, Lleyton Yelland. And that's "loser".

Beforehand, it was all bluster and self-confidence, yet when it came to the great cover price showdown, Moron lost his bottle and choked, giving up without even a whimper. Even the rain showed more guts.

Here's my advice to Panicky Piers: If all you can think of to publish is endless attacks on Tim Henman, then no wonder Yelland walked all over you. You might as well pack it in now. Loser!

On other pages

Those Afghan Lovelies – John Pilger picks his top sexy six **3**

Now It's Snooky – the great new sport **5**

Unfunny cartoon by Rowson **94**

TOP TV COMEDY RETURNS

by Our Media Staff
Anne Otherchancetosee

MEN BEHAVING BADLY, the award-winning farce about two men sharing adjacent houses in a London backstreet, is to make a return to our screens.

The laddish heroes, Tony and Gordon, are now five years older and many things have changed. Gordon has got married to the beautiful Sarah and Tony has had a baby.

But will they have grown up? "No way," says writer Alastair Campbell, who promises the same hilarious cocktail of loutish laughs, as the two men fail to come to terms with their responsibilities.

Cast In Full

Tony Blair	Martin Clunes
Gordon Brown	The other one
Cherie Blair	Caroline Quentin
Sarah Macauley	Lesley Ash
Anthony Booth	Himself

"Excuse me, but you've got your baby on upside down"

Vot You Missed

That Boris Becker Commentary In Full

Becker: For sure zat one vas out... and if he keeps hitting zem out he vill lose, I am thinking...

Announcer: Game, set and match to Hewitt!

Becker: Now he has lost for sure and ze reason is zat he did not vin as many games as his opponent... zat is vot happens in tennis... *(continued Wimbledon 2003)*

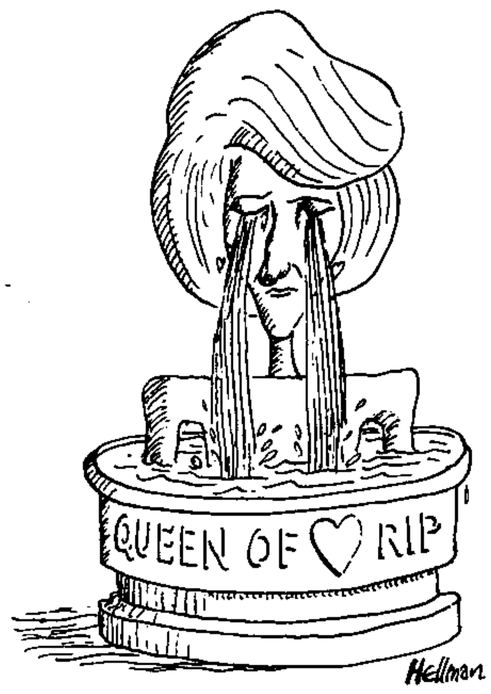
REWARDING AND DEVELOPING STAFF IN HIGHER EDUCTATION:
a guide to complying with HEFCE 01/16

The University & Colleges Employers Association web page

That Diana Fountain Delay Explained

PALACE SUGGESTION

GOVERNMENT SUGGESTION



Which would you choose?

Eye Hotline: 088374 267897

Summer Walks

with Old Bruce Anderson

No. 94 *The Garvaghy Road*

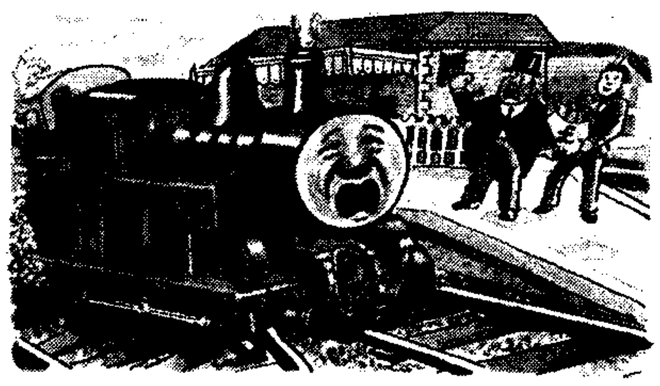
SEE traditional Northern Ireland in all its midsummer glory as you walk down this picturesque street strewn with rocks and burnt-out cars. If you listen carefully, you can hear the sound of marching bands, and if you are very lucky, you will hear the coarse cry of the Orange-Crested Paisley with his traditional call "Fockdapope! Fockdapope! Fockdapope!"

Assemble at nine o'clock with a stout pair of walking shoes, a bowler hat and an armour-plated vest. Survivors to meet up at the Ulster Royal Infirmary at the end of the walk.

THOMAS THE BANK ENGINE

(previously Thomas The Privatised Tank Engine)

BY THE REV. TAWDRY



THOMAS saw the Fat Controller, Mr Jarvis, standing on the platform with a big smile on his face.

"What are you so happy about?" asked Thomas. "Gordon's had a fatal accident, the passengers are angry, and all the trains are late."

"Never mind," laughed the Fat-Cat Controller. "Something has come in on time – my bonus! Hoorah!"

© The Rev. Tawdry 2002

Late News

ARAFAT CALLS FOR NEW ELECTIONS

IN A desperate attempt to stop the killing in the Middle East, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat today called for President Bush to step down and demanded that fresh elections be called to find a new American President.

"Indiscriminate bombing by Bush's supporters of villages and wedding parties has led to the deaths of countless innocent civilians," said a horrified Arafat. "Bush must now step aside for a leader not tarnished by failure and death."

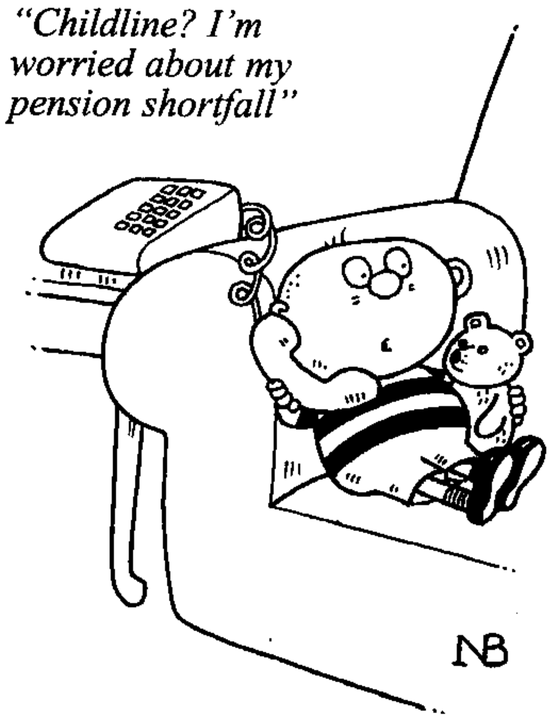
However, the demands were instantly rejected in Washington where a spokesman claimed that "the American people must choose their own President unless they choose Al Gore, in which case they must have George Bush".

MPs BACK BLAIR BID TO REJOIN LABOUR

IT'S EMERGED that several senior Labour officials and MPs are backing Prime Minister Tony Blair's application to rejoin the Labour Party.

A spokesman for the Labour Party said, "Tony Blair has spent the last five years or so in Government, so we in the party felt it was high time he returned to the Labour Party, where he doesn't belong."

"Childline? I'm worried about my pension shortfall"



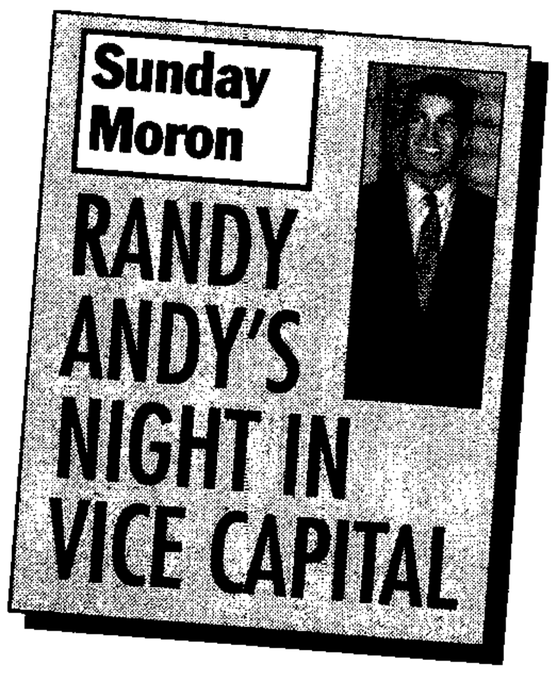
All The Filth You Missed Over The Weekend

A service to readers of quality broadsheets who are too embarrassed to be seen buying the News of the Screws from their local garage.

● The News of the World entertained its readers with a lurid tale (spread over 16 pages) concerning Blackburn-based snooker star Dean Haslum, ranked 397th in Britain, and a night he spent last September in the Ramada Hotel, Carshalton, with local lap-dancer Deirdre Slugg, 26.

Says Deirdre, "He had the biggest cue I've ever seen. He certainly slipped it in my pocket like a real pro."

There was more in this vein, under such headlines as "Snooky Nooky" and "He Scored The Maximum Every Time".



● The Sunday Moron, on the other hand, was more interested in the activities of minor royals.

A front-page exclusive revealed that Prince Andrew, 36, had recently paid a visit to what the paper called "the sex gutter of the universe".

This was reference to the Dutch city of Amsterdam, notorious for its red light district, where prostitutes openly flaunt their wares in windmills.

The paper had learned that last March the Prince had driven through the outskirts of the city on his way to open a trade fair in Utrecht.

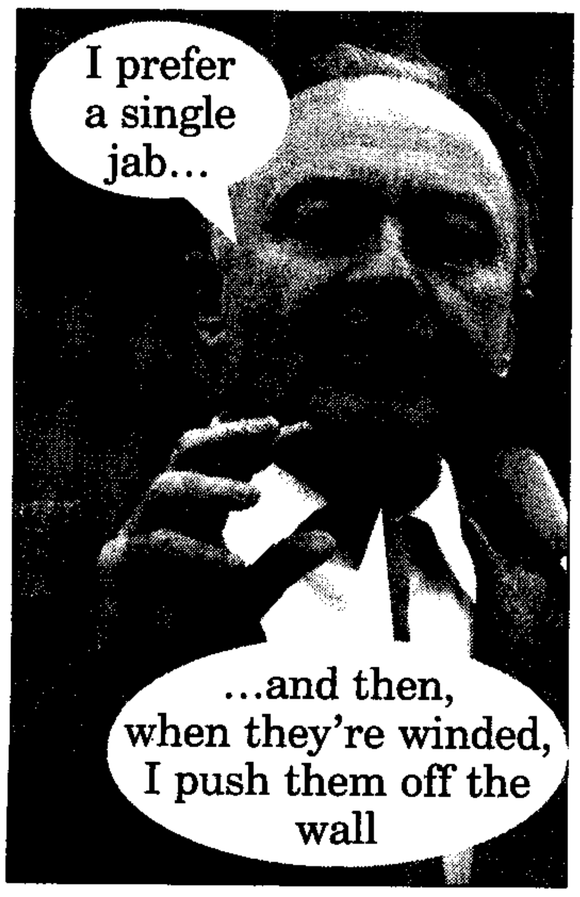
On his journey, the Sunday Moron revealed, "Randy Andy was within, literally, kilometres of some of the raunchiest vice dens in Europe."

The paper quoted one Dutch sex worker, Saskia Oranjeboom, 34, as saying, "None of us girls saw him. The Prince would have been very welcome if he had come to see us, but he didn't."

● The Mail on Sunday was able to report that the News of the Screws had revealed that former transport secretary Stephen Byers had saddled the public with £21 billion-worth of debt *(Surely "had enjoyed a night of non-stop bonking with Wallsend Councillor, Bettina Gobble, 56?" Ed.)*

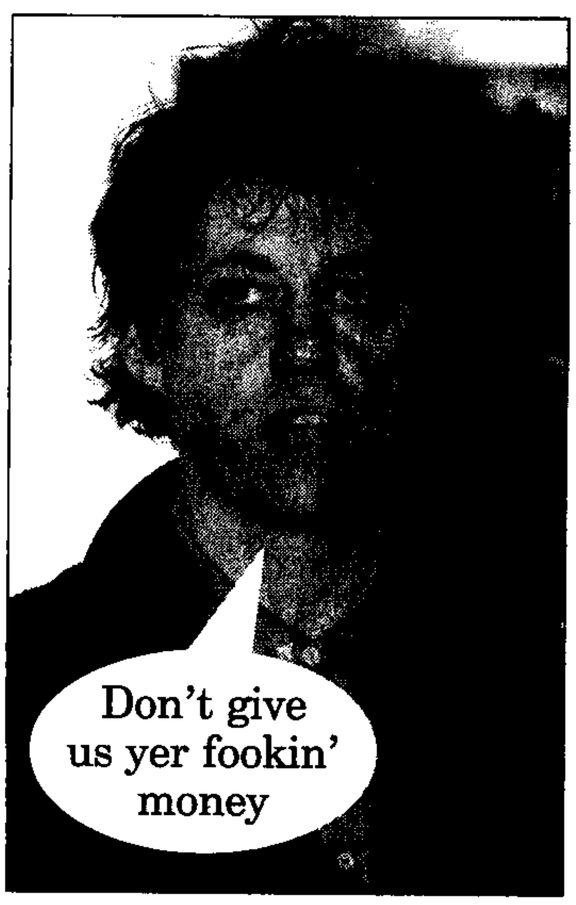
THE WEEK IN PICTURES

LIVINGSTONE SPEAKS OUT ON MMR



GEORGE MICHAEL CALLS FOR 'NO MORE BOMBS'

EURO SHOCK: GELDOF SPEAKS OUT



Royal teenagers Princes William and Harry will also miss the match because of the service to mark their grandmother's 50 years on the phone.

Jakarta Post

Neither Mr Paterson nor Mr Marr were unavailable for comment.

Worcester Evening News

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

Letters to the Editor

Lady Thatcher's Statue

SIR – I was appalled by the mindless vandalism inflicted on the recently unveiled statue of Queen Boadicea in the Guildhall. Is this the way we treat our heroes now? The assailant would not, of course, have dared confront the Queen in the flesh for fear of her lethal handbag with its iron spikes. What a coward!
Sir Herbert Gussett
The Thatch Cottage, Denis St Pisshead, Dorset.

SIR – If only the statue had been made of rubber then the vandal's iron bar would have sprung back and decapitated him instead, which he thoroughly deserved for his act of gross barbarism against one of the most sublime workds of art in history.
Wing Commander R.J.F. Moustache
The Queen's Head, Waldergrave.

SIR – Mrs Thatcher famously went "on and on and on". But now her head has come "off and off and off".
Mike Giggler
Via e-mail.

The Guardian

Letters

The Thatcher Debacle

I was appalled by the mindless attack on the statue of Mrs Thatcher. Why did the man not attack the real person and decapitate her, as she so richly deserves?
Graham Beard
The Student Union, The Royal College of Sparts, Kensington

● Why on earth did this self-styled anarchist choose to attack Mrs Thatcher who is totally irrelevant to modern Britain. The real reactionary Tory Leader is of course, er, none other than Tony Blair who should obviously be assassinated immediately as the true enemy of working people and a running-poodle of US imperialism.
The Rt. Hon. George Michael
The Old Cottage, Goring-on-Thames, Oxon

● Mrs Thatcher famously never lost her head. Until now!
Mike Giggler
Via e-mail

Do you have any comments on these letters? Or any comments on the fact that we're always asking for comments? Text us or email us at getalife@sad.co.uk

Ozymaggias

by Percy Bysshe Sparty

I met a traveller from, er, England
Who said:– A great big lump of stone
Stands in the Guildhall. Near to it, on the carpet,
Half sunk, a shatter'd visage lies, whose frown
And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamp'd on these lifeless things,
The hand that mock'd them and the heart that fed.
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymaggias, queen of queens.
Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!"

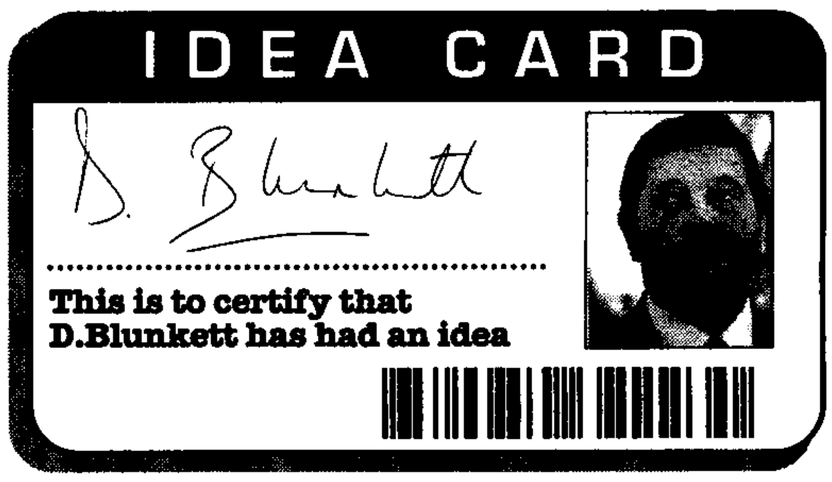
GOVERNMENT TO LAUNCH NEW 'IDEA CARD'

by Our Home Affairs Staff
Michael Whitepaper

THE HOME Secretary, Mr David Blunkett, has announced plans for a new card that shows that the government has had an idea recently.

"This card" said Blunkett "will tell you everything you need to know about our identity. It tells you that we are a government that thinks up silly ideas in the hope of distracting your attention from the fact that the country is falling apart."

How it Will Look



'YES – I HAD SOCKS' ADMITS BYERS

by Our Political Staff
Paul Feet

THE FORMER Transport Secretary, Mr Stephen Byers, confessed last night to having socks on when he was involved in a near-naked love-romp with a Labour councillor.

The embarrassed Byers said last night, "It was a terrible mistake. I had a few drinks at the bar and, before I knew it, I was involved in an unseemly socks act."

He continued, "Yes, I admit it. It was a case of unprotected socks, as I did not have my shoes on at the time."

Nude Labour

Labour colleagues said, "This is the end for Byers. It is one thing to mess up the railways and lie to Parliament. But it is quite another to be caught in a sordid socks scandal *(cont. p. 94)*

DAILY Mirror

Today the leaders of the free world must stop to take stock, after George Michael, one of this planet's most respected figures spoke out on his revulsion at the indiscriminate bombing of Afghanistan.

Mirror editor Piers Moron rightly claims that George's lyrics such as "Nine, nine, nine, getting jiggy, people did you see that fire in the city" have "exposed the culture of fear, retribution and often mindless bigotry pervading world affairs right now."

"People might accuse me of being politically naive," admitted George, speaking as he took a break from an exhaustive nine-month holiday, "but after seeing those innocent Somalis being bombed by President Carter, I couldn't stay silent any longer."

On other pages

Kylie Minogue calls for the closure of the Sangatte refugee camp **3**

Rick Astley predicts an end to the fighting between Pakistan and India over the disputed province of Kashmir **6**

The Mirror promises not to pander to celebrities promoting new records **94**

COUGH: MIXTURE AS BEFORE

by Our Political Staff Peter O'Bore

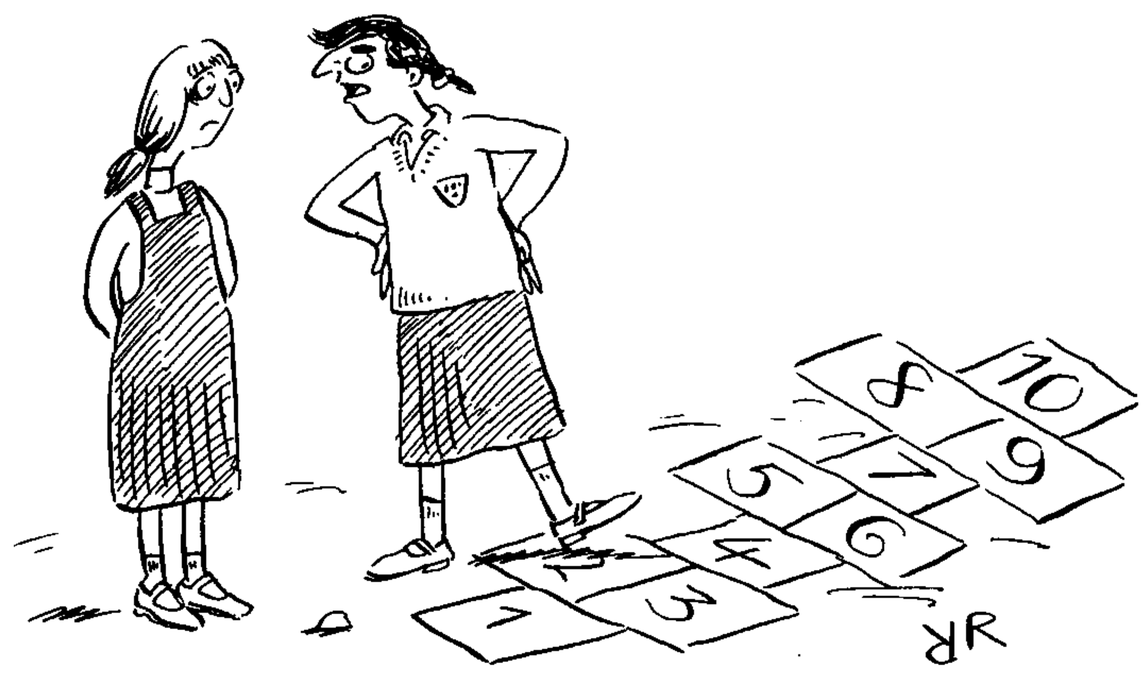
IN A FURTHER dazzling initiative which has thrown a bombshell into the normally placid world of Westminster, Mr Duncan Cough, leader of the Conservative Party, has let it be known that he proposes to say nothing about anything for the indefinite future.

When asked last night to comment on his new "no comment" policy, Cough cleverly refused to comment.

A close friend of Mr Cough said, "You won't catch him out that way. He's far too bright for you lot."

Sources in Tory Central Office said, "Iain's strategy is really paying off. Our private polling shows that 86% of the voters have no idea who he is. In May the figure was only 73%. The message is getting across – don't blame the Tories, because you've forgotten who we are."

Oliver Letwin is 23.



"It doesn't appear to have an 'interactive' facility"

The Little Match Girl

by Hans Arthur Andersen

IT WAS terribly cold and it was the last day of the financial year. Conditions were perfect for selling matches and the Little Match Girl had sold over ten million matches on that very day, declaring pre-tax profits of over $50

billion dollars. Unfortunately she caught a cold and died and when the regulator investigated the accounts of matchgirl.com, they realised it had all been a fairytale and I was arrested.

© Hans Arthur Andersen

'NO' CAMPAIGN GATHERS MOMENTUM

by Our Economics Staff **Euro Geller**

AFTER a much-heralded launch last week, the Euro campaign to say "no" to celebrities has been attracting enormous support across the country.

"It's not political," said a typical anti-celebrity campaigner. "It's just that we don't want celebrities foisted on us when we have no say in the matter."

Said another, "There is no evidence that there are any benefits to having celebrities. And I think that in the long term they are probably damaging to our British way of life.

"We've managed without celebrities running our economy for thousands of years. Now, whether we like it or not, we suddenly have comedians telling us about convergence theory."

He concluded: "It's time we had a referendum on the celebrity issue and finally allow the nation to say 'no' to these people off the telly."

On Other Pages

☐ Little and Large on the crisis in British pensions **2**

☐ Keith Harris and Orville on a possible return to the Gold Standard **3**

☐ Adolf Hitler on why one should not laugh at Rik Mayall **94**

GILBERT & GEORGE DIRTY WORDS PICTURES 1977 SERPENTINE GALLERY
OH, GOODNESS ME! I SEEM TO HAVE HIT MY THUMB WITH MY HAMMER!
PISS
FUCK
FUCKED UP
CUNT
SHIT
STIFF
EXIT
GENTS
SWEAR BOX
THEY CALLED THEMSELVES LIVING SCULTURES I'VE ALWAYS THOUGHT OF THEM AS GARDEN GNOMES
I'VE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO FIGURE OUT WHICH ONE IS GEORGE AND WHICH ONE IS GILBERT
WELL, THEY SEEM TO HAVE HAD A HUGE EFFECT ON TELEVISION
EXIT
NOW WASH YOUR HANDS
HEATH

ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK

SIR THOMAS STOPPARD O.M.

At 65, you must have had a lot of experience with spoons?

The older I get, the less I want to think about my past. I can't say that very much comes to mind in that respect. But although there's nothing very specific I can put my finger on, that doesn't mean to say that spoons have played no part in my life. I am sure they have. Although they don't feature in my new trilogy of plays about...

You're known to be an intensely private person. Does that explain your reluctance to talk about spoons?

Yes and no. There comes a point where any public figure, like myself, is expected to have a view on everything, and that includes spoons. I am reminded of that wonderful line in Philip Trilby's 'The Watershed', where one of the characters says "am I getting up or going to bed?" I more and more feel like that.

With your foreign background, do you feel you have a different perspective on British spoons?

One of the things I most appreciate about living in Britain is its tolerance towards spoons of all kinds. You don't necessarily have to use the same spoons as someone else to be accepted. I think there's a lot to be said for that attitude. In my new trilogy...

Is there any type of spoon you particularly dislike?

I would say that Mrs Thatcher did a lot of harm to the arts in general, and I think that probably goes for spoons as well. Or am I being unfair?

Has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

I wish I could answer that.

NEXT WEEK: Jim Naughtie – *"Me And My Keyring."*

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Spud Melin, American inventor

So. Farewell then
Spud Melin,
Inventor of the hula hoop
And also, amazingly,
The frisbee.

I am not old enough to
remember
The hula hoop craze,
But Keith and I
Used to play frisbee
When we were
At Uni.
(Surely "Polytechnic"? Ed.)
E.J. Thrisbee (17½)

PS. Why were you known as "Spud"? Surely you did not invent the potato as well?

TV Highlights

BBC1 Ready, Steady, Cook
presented by Arthur Andersen

JOIN Arthur and his top accountant friends as they cook the books to create a recipe for economic disaster. And look out for Arthur's catchphrase – "Here's one I made up earlier!"

EYE RATING: Mmmm Smells Fishy

ITV Survivor

DAVID LIDDIMENT becomes the latest casualty of the expensive flop show ITV. David failed in the primary task of getting any ratings and became unpopular with viewers when he tried to reschedule News At Ten and put football on the television at a time when no one wanted to watch.

EYE RATING: ZZZZZZZZZ!

That Elton John Citation In Full

SALUTAMUS ELTONIUS JOHANNENSIS CANTORUS POPULARIS COMPOSITOR "CANDELLUS IN VENTO" CELEBRATISSIMA CANTATA IN FUNERALIS DIANAE "PRINCIPESSA CORDIUM" ET FAMOSISSIMUS PIANISTUS CUM BIFOCALES LUDICROSSIMI CUM WIGGI GROTESQUI SIMULARITER LIBERACE QUONDAM DENIGRATUS ET VILIFICATUS IN "SOLE" (PAPERIUS MURDOCHENSIS) "POOFTUS NARCOTICUS" VOCATUS SED RECOMPENSATUS AB AWARDUS DAMAGENSIS PUNITIVUS MMMMMM LIBRI (AUT MCCCLXIV EUROS) ATQUE AMATOR FLORIBUNDIUM LILIAE ROSARUMQUE ET NARCISSI ET ULTIME HONORATUS AB BLAIRUS MAXIMUS IMPERATOR "SIR ELTONIUS" ELEVATUS AD EQUES BRITANNICUS CUM "SIR CLIFFUS", "SIR MICKUS", "SIR MACCUS" ET MULTOS ALTEROS PISSPOORICES MUSICIANENSES POPULARES. SALUTAMUS REGINA TANTRUM ET TIARA.

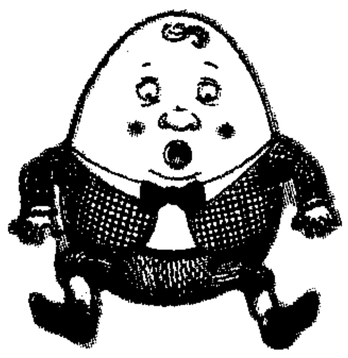
© ACADEMIA REGALIS MUSICUM MMII
(MOTTO: DUMBUS DOWNUS)

the PREMIERSH*TS
PAUL WOOLEY
Y'KNOW I REALLY LOVE WIMBLEDON
REALLY BOSS?
COME ON TIM
YEH, THE EXCITEMENT, THE PASSION, THE PATRIOTISM, AND ABOVE ALL...
IT'S A GREAT TIME TO BURY BAD NEWS!
HOME SUPPORTERS
HOW F**KIN' MUCH?
2002-03 SEASON TICKETS NOW ON SALE

NURSERY TIMES

(incorporating the Evening Standard) Friday, July 12, 2002

'I WAS PUSHED' claims Humpty



by Veronica Waddleduck

IN A sensational development that has threatened to ruin the career of the Lord Mayor of Toytown, a Mr Humpty Dumpty, 26, has claimed that he did not fall off the wall, as originally reported, but was pushed by the Lord Mayor.

The rotund former egg told the *Nursery Times* that a scuffle had broken out at a tea party involving the Lord Mayor, Sir Redfaced Ken, and his pregnant live-in partner Little Red Riding Ken.

Rotten Egg

Said Humpty: "The Mayor had consumed a large number of winegums and was acting in a strange manner.

"I was sitting innocently on the wall minding my own business," he continued, "when I heard the Lord Mayor screaming at his partner to stop eating her chocolate cigarette as it would make her sick.

"The next thing I knew, I was lying in pieces on the floor, and all the King's Paramedics were trying to put me together again. But the Lord Mayor had run off into the woods."

Ten questions the Mayor of Toytown must answer

1. How high is the wall that Humpty fell off?

2. Were you the worse for winegums?

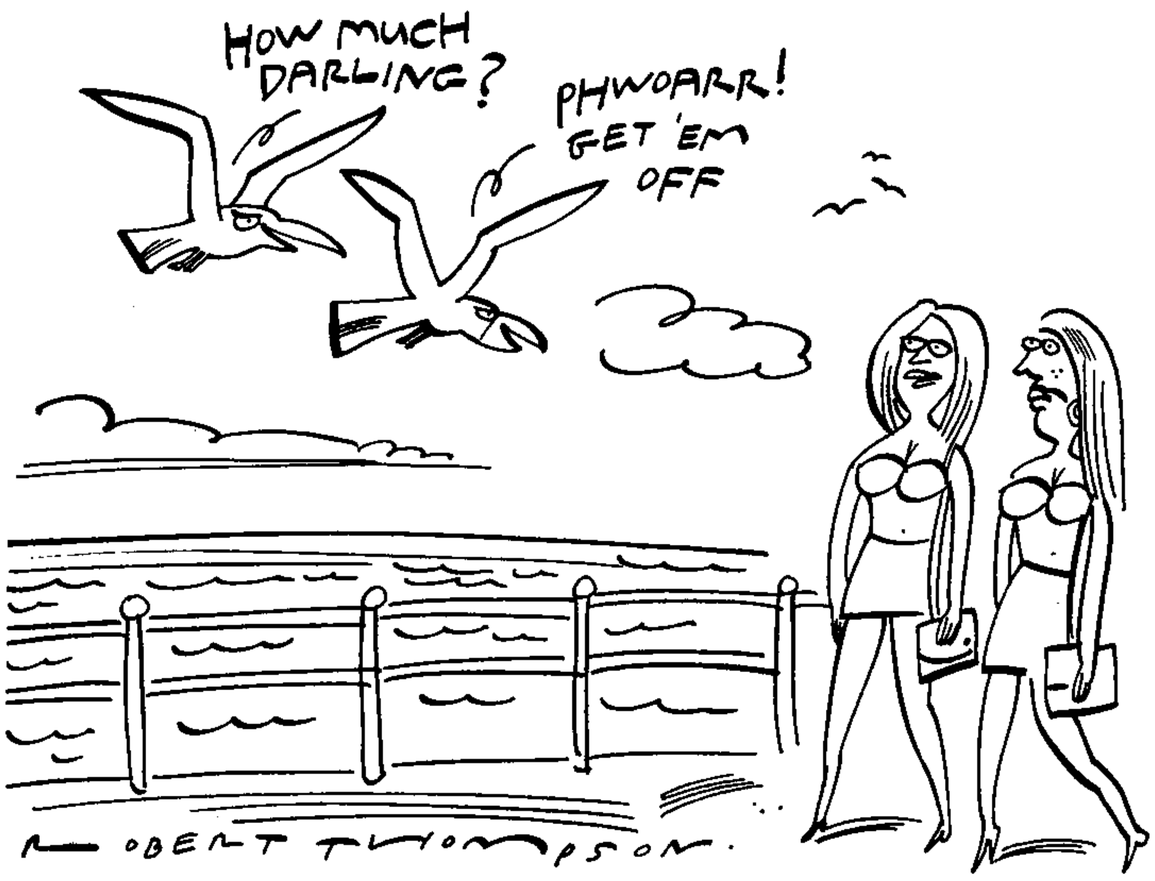
3. Is anyone still reading this?

4. Er...

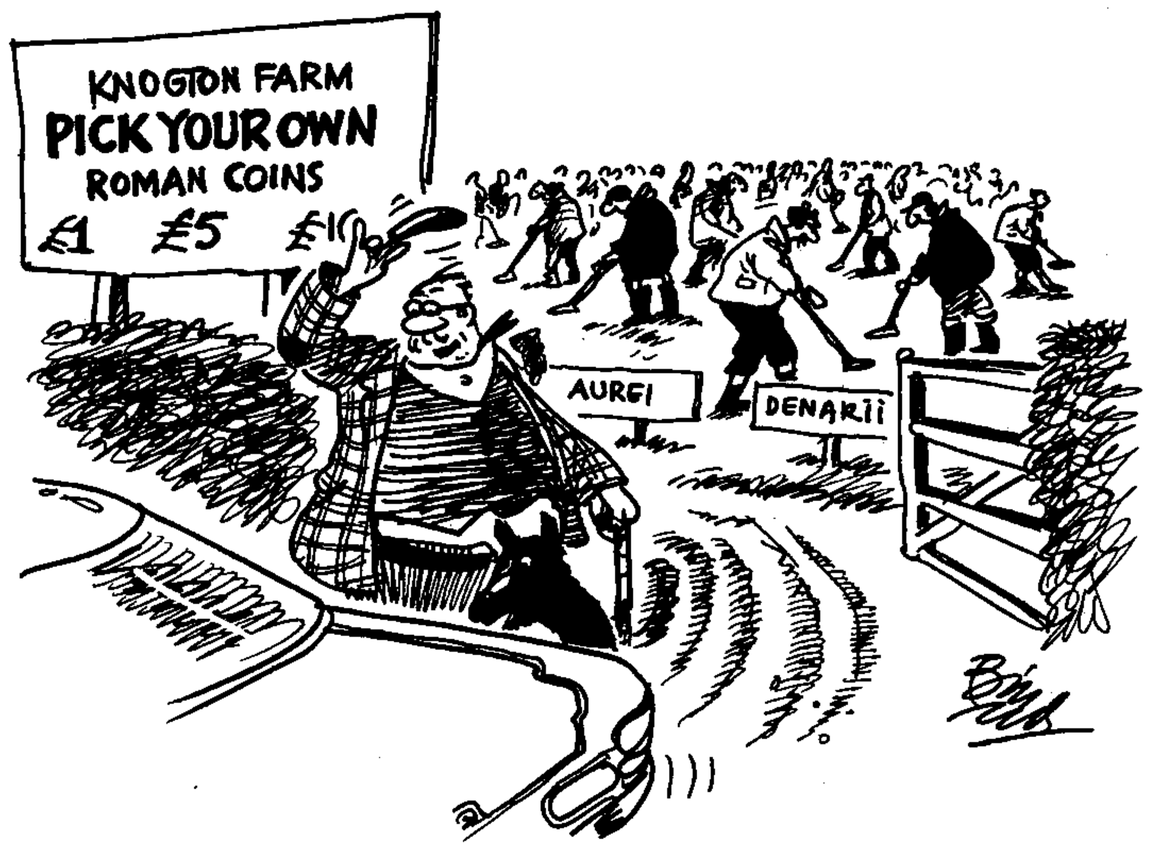
5. That's it.

Mr Dumpty is an employee of the *Nursery Times*

ON OTHER PAGES ● *Incredibly old woman refuses to leave shoe* **3** ● *Three little pigs – new foot and mouth scare* **4** ● *Gingerbread house on market for £750,000* **94**



"They say they're the souls of dead sailors"



"Bye, bye – better luck next time!"

THE TIMES FRIDAY JULY 12 2002

Questions Answered

Q: ***Why do tennis balls have wavy lines on them?***

A: The earliest known tennis balls were made in Ancient Egypt, dating from the 3rd Millennium (the reign of King Agassi the 14th). They were made from stones, and featured a wavy hieroglyph showing a stork, a sacred animal associated with the after-life. The first tennis balls in England, referred to in Shakespeare's Henry V, were probably made of sheep's gut stuffed with elderberries. There is unfortunately no record of any markings on these balls, whether wavy or otherwise.

Q: ***Why do we always speak of "underpants" in the plural? Is there such a thing as a single "pant"?***

A: The word "underpants" is derived from the old High German "underpanten", meaning "one who feeds swine with acorns". In the 18th century there was a fashion in Pomerania for a kilt-like garment, worn under the trousers. Because of their "rustic" look, these became known as "Der Trouserpress", from which we get the term in common use today.

Q: ***Why do people use the exclamation "Great Scott!"? Is there any connection with the famous Polar explorer?***

A: No, sadly. This expression is a corruption of the phrase "Grate Scut", meaning the tail of a rabbit (the "scut") used by 18th century parlourmaids to clean out fireplaces or "grates".

Q: ***Does anyone read that "other bit" of the Times any more, where they now put obituaries and rubbish like this.***

A: You are, of course, referring to The Register, which was the original name of The Times, before it became known as The Morning Post. In 1838 *(cont'd. p. 94)*

THE Sun

Apology

In recent years, in common with all other Murdoch newspapers, we may have given the mistaken impression that the BBC was a tired, bloated anachronism, offering dreadful value for money, which of course is sadly out of touch with viewers.

We now realise, in light of the BBC and Sky being jointly awarded the digital television licence left by the collapse of ITV digital, that the BBC is in fact a vibrant, streamlined jewel in the crown of British broadcasting, offering terrific value for money and is, of course, beloved by viewers.

We apologise for any confusion caused and any confusion in the future when the first time the BBC governors stop Rupert doing exactly what he wants with this channel we label them as being a tired anachronism offering dreadful... etc... etc...

DIARY

THE DAY I POSED FOR LUCIAN FREUD

SIR TIM RICE: *I'd never get into a feud*
With Lucian Freud!
That would be very rude
And not at all good!

THE RT REVEREND GEORGE CAREY: What exactly do we MEAN when we say that this or that artist is going to "paint our portrait"? This is the question I put to the painter Lucian Freud as I undressed for him and sat on a bar stool with one foot in the air for my official retiring portrait as "ArchB of C" the other day.

Lucian can't have heard me, because he just stood there with a very concentrated expression on his face. So I tried my level best to answer the question for him. "I suppose what we really mean, correct me if I'm wrong" I said, "is that he – or she, because let's not forget there are some tremendously able women artists in operation at the present time – is going to try to put down their impressions of us as 'human beings' on a canvas, using paints and brushes rather than just words.

"It's all about our old friend 'communication'. That's the name of this particular game, wouldn't you agree, Lucian?"

Oddly enough, he didn't reply. He just marched up to me and re-adjusted my mitre, pulling it over my eyes.

"I've always thought Jesus was a prime mover in the communication game," I said, wondering where I was. "In fact I sometimes think he'd be playing for Man U. if he were alive today – which of course he is, in ways we can't hope to fully understand. Tell me, which team do you support, Lucian? I'm a huge Gunners fan, myself!"

Lucian replied with a lovely simple gesture which will remain with me for many a long while yet. Very gently and with great tenderness, he placed a lovely woolly sock in my mouth. It was to me a very warm, very Christian gesture, a reminder that there is a world beyond words. But what exactly do we MEAN by "words"?

BARONESS THATCHER: The poor man had been making a magnificent effort, truly magnificent. But sadly it wasn't going quite as one would have planned.

"You don't want to do it like that!" I said, rising up from the couch. I pointed to the cactus he was painting onto the canvas, due east of my buttocks, "No-one likes a cactus in a painting. There's nothing cheerful in a cactus. The cactus is not a BRITISH plant. It does not bat for Britain!"

So out went the cactus. I took another long, hard look at that canvas. One does so hate mess. It was a sorry sight. Mr Freud had pictured me looking unkempt and bedraggled upon an unmade bed, my legs jutting out at peculiar angles. As any woman will tell you, if one wants a job doing well, one simply has to do it oneself. So I prised the paint-brush out of poor Mr Freud's hands and set about making some improvements.

"That whippet's got to go! No-one likes a whippet!" I said, painting a lovely sunset in prosperous reds and yellows all over the scraggy, mean-spirited little hound. I then set-to with my brushes, painting an open window onto the bare grey wall. "Fresh air – we British love a bit of fresh air, Mr F!" I explained. The poor man didn't reply, he simply looked daggers. "Chin up!" I said. How one hates a moaning minnie!

In the corner of the painting, where a very smudgy half-full waste-paper bin had once been, with a few good, strong strokes I added a doughty British Tommy with a tremendous smile on his face proudly running the Union Jack up a flagpole. Magnificent!

"B-b-but" said Mr Freud.

"If you'll just let me finish!" I said.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

JILLY COOPER: As Lucian wielded his ginormous brush in his big strong hairy masculine hands, Jilly lay back on the expensive couch, purchased five years ago in a moment of sheer madness from Heal's store in London's fashionable Tottenham Court Road, and positively quivered with excitement. It seemed as though her whole body was aching with the desire to be painted by this Casanova of the canvas. How she wished he would fling off his beret, strip off his smock and ride her like a red rosette-winner in a top people's gymkhana.

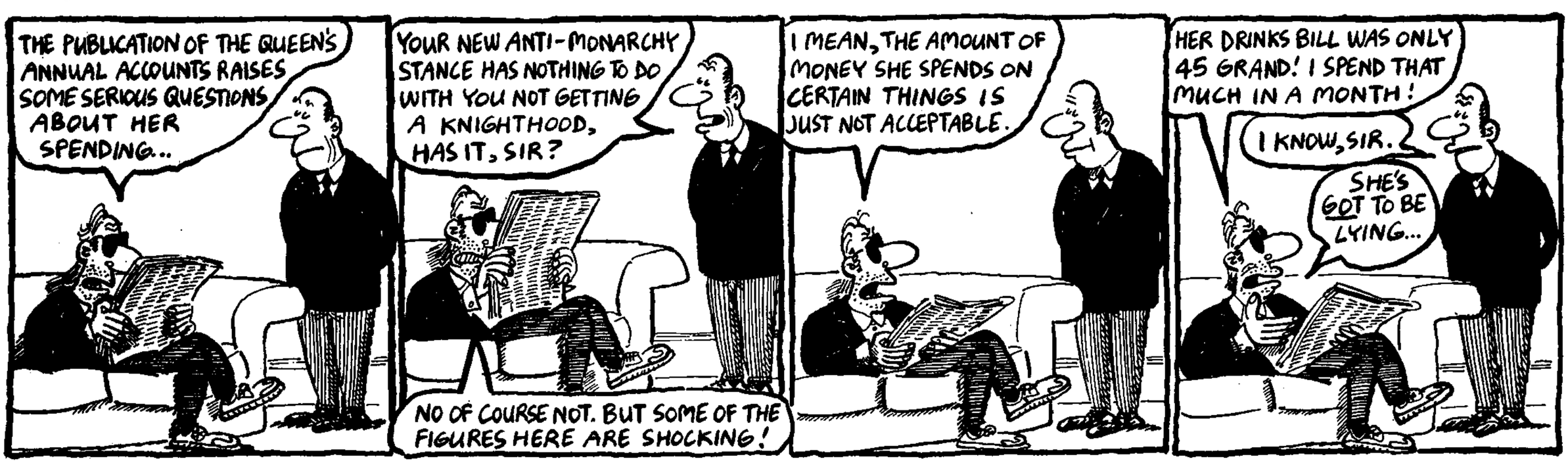
"There's no SMOCK without fire," she giggled, punningly. She could see he was about to collapse in hoots of laughter, so she added, "I hope this will be a 'STILL LIFE', Lucian! Because there's certainly STILL some LIFE left in me!!!!"

At that moment, Lucian's moody gaze seemed to erupt in an explosion of merriment. Golly, he looked so deliciously sexy when he giggled, thought Jilly. A tear came into her eye. In a certain light, he reminded her of her gorgeous, faithful and utterly utterly darling three-legged mutt, Bubbles, who she had had to have put down at the end of last year, in time for Christmas. Bubbles and Lucian both had that look in their eyes, that playful glint that seemed to say, "I'm lovely and I'm sexy and I'm wholly irresistible!" The only difference was that Lucian didn't have a tail to wag around.

Or did he?

THE RT HON JOHN PRESCOTT: He comes into my office, right, the office of Leputy Deader, and appertaining to the matter under discretion he sets up his easel and asks me to take off and/or conduct the removalisation of my clothes, up to and including my bubble-dreasted toot and sigh. Well, hang on,

I think, I've never met the bloke before, maybe he's one of those predating tory sumo hexuals we read so much about. So I keeps on my vest and my Y-fronts, and I say "I'll go this far but no further. Now where do you want me sat?" He says he wants me splayed out on the office desk with a rose out me arsehole and a ballpoint out me left ear. "Out!" I say, pointing to the door and pressing the button for Security. If this is Modern Art, you know where you can shove it. Frankly, I've never been so insultivated in all my dawn bays.


THE PUBLICATION OF THE QUEEN'S ANNUAL ACCOUNTS RAISES SOME SERIOUS QUESTIONS ABOUT HER SPENDING..
YOUR NEW ANTI-MONARCHY STANCE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU NOT GETTING A KNIGHTHOOD, HAS IT, SIR?
NO OF COURSE NOT. BUT SOME OF THE FIGURES HERE ARE SHOCKING!
I MEAN, THE AMOUNT OF MONEY SHE SPENDS ON CERTAIN THINGS IS JUST NOT ACCEPTABLE.
HER DRINKS BILL WAS ONLY 45 GRAND! I SPEND THAT MUCH IN A MONTH!
I KNOW, SIR.
SHE'S GOT TO BE LYING...

Literary Review

Dot.comedy of errors

Dot.con
John Cassidy
(Allen Lane £9.99)

Dot.bomb
J David Kuo
(Little, Brown, £14.99)

Dot.bomb
Rory Cellan-Jones
(Aurum Press, £10.99)

Boo Hoo
Ernst Malmsten
(Random House, £17.99)

The Dot.bomb Survival Guide
Sean Carton
(McGraw-Hill, £20)

Easy Money
Philip Coggan
(Profile Books, £7.99)

LEST we forget, at one point in 1999 priceline.com was valued at more than the entire US airline industry. Priceline.com? Exactly. Now the dust has settled on the five-year spell of collective idiocy known as the dot.com revolution, the books begin.

Broadly speaking they fall into two camps: the young turks fresh from business school explaining how hilariously bad they were at running a business; and the seasoned e-hacks explaining how dumb we were to listen to the young turks. In the midst of the Worldcom fiasco and numerous other cases of tech-stock fallout, neither of these camps offers much salutary reading.

Concentrating first on "ho-ho, we really blew it" memoirs like *Boo Hoo* and Kuo's *Dot.Bomb*, what really irks is how they document their own astounding hubris with barely an ounce of contrition. Ernst Malmsten, the author of *Boo Hoo*, was a Swedish poetry critic before he teamed up with gorgeous, pouting Kajsa Leander and founded boo.com. He seems to want *Boo Hoo* to read like a lament for a glorious vision defiled, whereas in fact it merely shows him, his partner, their bankers and most of their employees to have been woefully incompetent.

Malmsten and co got through £130m in 12 months, leaving behind a company worth £1. Months before their website even worked they were buying designer suits for photo ops, flying in Concorde and hiring every consultant available to make up for their all-too-obvious lack of business nous. Rapacious banks gave them endless funds and they set off like mall-rats with Daddy's Amex. Ernst thinks this is all okay because boo was one big family, it was a crazy time and they all worked really hard at something they "believed" in. Let us hope that all the people who ended up jobless see things that way too – presumably they don't have lucrative publishing contracts, potential film

rights and public speaking engagements ("My part in my downfall") to fall back on.

The authors in the second camp have quite sensibly opted to call upon the journalist's prerogative of being wise after the event. Books like Sean Carton's *The Dot Bomb Survival Guide* or *FT* hack Philip Coggan's *Easy Money* poke fun at dead ducks like clickmango.com before offering their own helpful axioms like: "The only way to make money from daytrading is to write a book about it." Plainly several journalists have followed this advice to the letter. It goes without saying that they are much the same crowd who inflated the dot.com bubble until it burst, and are now penning damage limitation guides to the mayhem they helped create.

With publishing's long lead times all the above should be congratulated on their speed from the blocks. Several of them can barely have finished sacking employees before ringing their agent to flog the story of their remarkable ineptness. Nevertheless, be it Malmsten's risible e-tailors, Kuo's horribly misconceived Value America.com or Cassidy's exhaustive, impressive social history, the lessons that emerge are so obvious it's embarrassing to list them: bankers are greedy; there's no such thing as easy money (unless you're a banker); and the bright young things who flit from Oxbridge to Goldman Sachs and onwards are invariably the most witless of the lot.

Other key learnings: don't borrow money you can't pay back; experience is useful; and posh kids can't do business for toffee. In other words, the much-vaunted new economy turned out to be remarkably similar to the old one – $75bn in initial public offerings later. All in all, if the dot.com entrepreneurs had read Grimm's fairy tales rather than PPE at Oxford, a whole lot of heartache, as well as most of these books, could have been avoided.

But if their conclusions are blindingly obvious, it's the single lack of any kind of regret from the architects of the speculative bubble that will frustrate those who got bitten. These staggering splurges were all ultimately financed by flotations, using money from the stock market to keep pies in the sky. Although the inevitable collapse would have meant nothing more than a paper loss to the bigwigs who'd retained their shares throughout, it's likely that insurance companies, pension funds, other mutuals and the small-time home investor would have been stung to the tune of billions.

It was the stockbrokers, the analysts and a fawning media who were supposed to tell the little man that this could plainly never last: instead, they hyped it to the rafters, waited a year and then wrote books telling us how stupid we all were. Call it the dot.con con, if you like.

Novel gazing

Friday Night Club
Harry Ritchie
(Hodder & Stoughton, £14.95)

Gaveston
Stephanie Merritt
(Faber, £10.99)

And then, if things get really desperate, you can always write a novel…

NOBODY actually appends this cop-out clause to recruitment ads for literary editors, of course, but the implication hangs in the air like woodsmoke. Sebastian Faulks (formerly of the *Independent*) has done it. Giles Foden (currently of the *Guardian*) has done it, why not have a go?

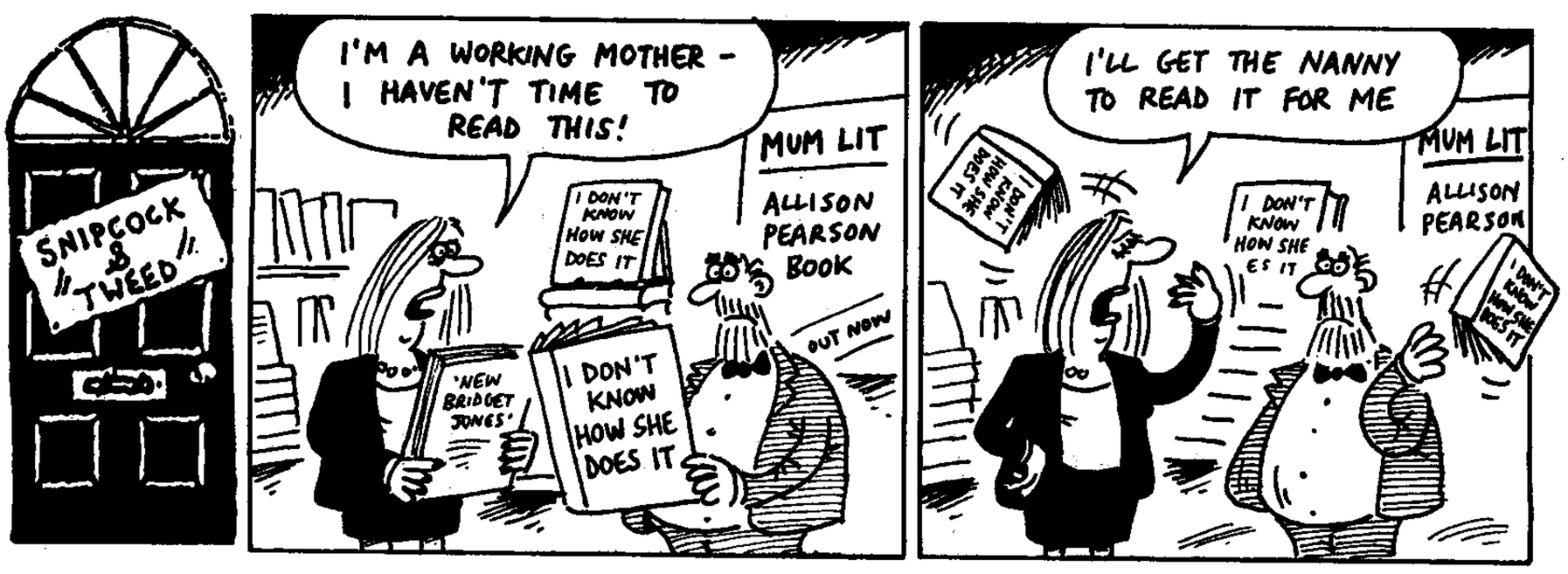
Harry Ritchie is a former books editor at the *Sunday Times*, which he left – famously – after a series of rows with its editor, John Witherow, culminating in the latter's binning of a lavishly framed review (acquired with some difficulty) by John Updike on the grounds that Updike – possibly the most celebrated living American writer – was unknown to him. Stephanie Merritt helps Robert McCrum with the exacting task of putting together the *Observer*'s books coverage. Each has written a novel which touches on – in Ritchie's case incidentally, in Merrit's full-on – the world of upmarket meejah journalism.

Ah, those books world *romans à clef*! *How* the publishers love them! Two years ago it was Terence Blacker's *Kill Your Darlings*. A few years before that it was Amanda Craig's *A Vicious Circle*. The fact that such offerings are generally of no interest to anyone save the half-dozen recognisable literary types who wander round in them is somehow a minor inconvenience when set against the chance of getting your own back.

There is consequently an inevitability about those parts of *Friday Night Club* – a superior bloke novel about a band of thirtysomething muckers who convene for an end-of-week piss-up – that take place in the offices of the, um, *Sunday Chronicle*: Witherow is pinioned to the page in all his lowbrow glory and even the Updike spat, not to mention the confusion of the well-known academic Stuart Hall with his eponym on Radio Five Live, is gallantly reprised.

Ms Merritt, on the other hand, has gone the whole hog and compiled a breathless *Who's Who*-not of modern media land: the plutocrat who's endowing a Cambridge media faculty; the plausible telegenic hunk bussed in as professor; reams of guff about a TV series called *Reflecting England* not to mention elections for something called the "English parliament".

The distinguishing mark of literary *romans à clef*, leaving aside minor considerations of readability and interest, is that no one can do the names. Amanda Craig produced a ladykilling man of letters called, ah, "Percy Flage" (Andrew Motion, in case you were wondering). Our Stephs, alternatively, has a hero called Piers Gaveston of the *Sunday Enquirer*, a "People's Poet" named "Jonathan Pleasant", while two of the new faculty members are "Candida Hampshire" (previously head of programming at Channel Four) and "Gilroy Achebe" who teaches – wait for it – "Other Studies". The lesson of these two novels seems to be that being a literary editor can, all too literally, cramp your style.


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
I'M A WORKING MOTHER - I HAVEN'T TIME TO READ THIS!
'NEW BRIDGET JONES'
I DON'T KNOW HOW SHE DOES IT
MUM LIT
ALLISON PEARSON BOOK
OUT NOW
I'LL GET THE NANNY TO READ IT FOR ME
MUM LIT
ALLISON PEARSON

Books & Bookmen

■ WRITING about Harry Ritchie's forthcoming fictional hatchet job on his former colleagues at the *Sunday Times*, most notably editor John Witherow, *Independent* columnist John Walsh recalled a previous such episode on the Street of Shame.

"It seems ages since Amanda Craig's *A Vicious Circle* skewered the reputations of several literary time-servers and media tarts and the first version of the book had to be withdrawn amid complaints from Ms Craig's former beloved David Sexton (literary editor of the London *Evening Standard*) about her fictional portrayal of a louche and revolting literary editor."

It must indeed seem like ancient history to Walsh. For it seems to have escaped his memory that the louche literary editor in the novel, Ivo Sponge – a flamboyant, loquacious, partygoing dandy notorious for pursuing comely young female authors with a crude seduction technique known as "the Sponge lunge" – was agreed to be, at least part, a portrait of, er, John Walsh, who had tried an unsuccessful "Sponge lunge" on Amanda Craig a few years earlier.

■ HERE's Alexandra Shulman reviewing Allison Pearson's novel *I Don't Know How She Does It* in the London *Evening Standard*: "acutely observed... compellingly readable... cleverly written." True, she also found the heroine "ultimately soulless", but the piece was scarcely a hatchet-job.

Nevertheless, it was not ecstatic enough to satisfy Pearson, who writes a column for the *Standard*. She protested furiously to editor Veronica Wadley, who summoned literary editor David Sexton for a severe bollocking.

From now on, it seems, when any *Standard* contributor publishes a book, Sexton will have to order his critics to deliver rave reviews before they are entrusted with the task of actually reading it.

■ IN 1988 Sidgwick & Jackson published *Wallis, The Secret Lives of the Duchess of Windsor* by Charles Higham.

The book's surprising thesis was that the duchess was a devoted fascist with many fascist lovers, who was not averse to passing on state secrets to the fascist powers and their representatives, including her lover, the Nazi ambassador in London, Joachim von Ribbentrop; and that she was a skilled courtesan who learnt the subtleties of her trade in the brothels of Shanghai.

A howl of outrage from the literary establishment greeted the book. Frances Donaldson, biographer of Edward VIII (later the Duke of Windsor), wrote in a review that the book should never have been published and brought shame and disgrace on the publisher. She argued instead that the duchess, like the duke, had been opposed to war with Germany but were always loyal to Britain

Now, 14 years later, after much diligence and a refusal to take no for an answer, the *Guardian* has obtained – and published – hitherto classified documents from the American FBI. The documents show that President Roosevelt and many of his advisers were suspicious of the duchess because of her fascist sympathies and lovers, including von Ribbentrop. She was in their view likely to pass on secret information to the enemy, and while in America was kept under close surveillance.

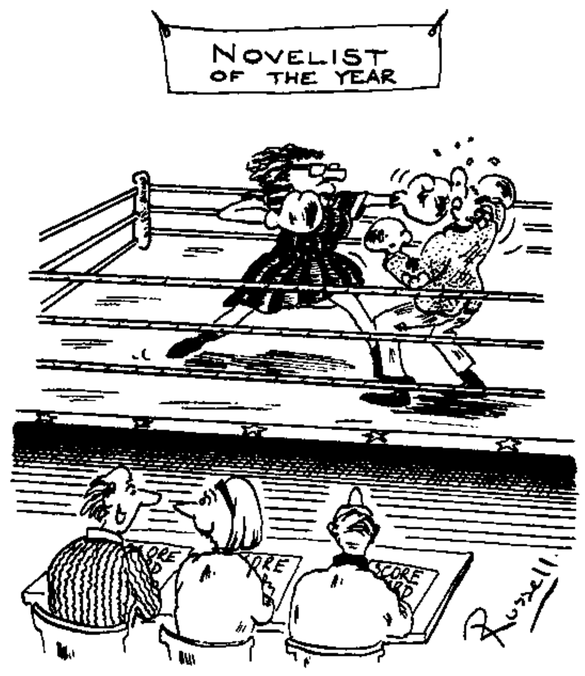
The documents also include spicy material about the duchess's sexual prowess, including her special abilities in the area of satisfying impotence and near-impotence. The familiar howl of outrage has been led this time by another biographer of the Hitler-loving duke, Philip Ziegler, who had also tried, though unsuccessfully, to get hold of the FBI documents.

■ WHETHER or not Canongate moves to London (see *Eye* 1056), many wonder what Jamie Byng – stepson of BT chairman Sir Christopher "Pigling" Bland – will do to fill the vacuum left by the departure of Kevin Williamson and his Rebel Inc imprint.

Rebel Inc, founded a decade ago by Williamson as a fanzine showcasing writers like Irvine Welsh, had become the name under which most of the list's edgier material was issued. But at the end of last year disagreements between Byng and Williamson came to a head and Williamson pulled out of the agreement, taking the name with him and planning to set up as a publisher in his own right as well as establishing a cannabis café in Edinburgh.

Now Byng will have to assemble a new list, but the company's increasing reliance on cult reprints and music books franchised from *Mojo* magazine make it questionable whether the will to do so exists.

Meanwhile authors are suffering from Canongate's lack of direction: *Spitting Off Tall Buildings*, the latest from the beatish Dan Fante was announced by its publisher as "the last in the Bruno Dante trilogy". This came as news to the author, who had planned to carry on with the series. Canongate then shelved Fante's book of poetry, which had been slated as a Rebel Inc. title. Mercifully it has since been picked up by the tiny Wrecking Ball Press.



"This is far more satisfactory than having to read their books"

■ AFTER a period in the wilderness, Metro founder Susanne McDadd has resurfaced as proprietor of a website called Publishing-services.co.uk. The site offers advice to authors on finding an agent and getting published, as well as offering more personalised applications of McDadd's "expertise" for a modest fee.

Sadly the site contains no pointer on how to get royalties out of publishers who can't/won't pay. As *Eye* readers will recall, under McMadd Metro gained a reputation as one of the worst payers in publishing. Indeed, almost all of the authors she lists in her online CV – including *Daily Telegraph* science expert Dr Roger Highfield, TV shrink Raj Persaud and Orange Prize nominee Maggie Gee – were owed vast sums in royalties when Metro went into receivership, receiving only a proportion of their dues under John Blake's rescue package.

'Bookworm'

Pseuds Corner

As anyone who has ever worked as an advisor to a senior politician knows...

AMANDA PLATELL
New Statesman

Indeed, it is hard not to see some politics in the fate of France, driven out goalless from the competition yesterday. When they were an advertisement for multicultural diversity, the French ruled the world. This time, initially bereft of their star, the Algerian Frenchman Zinedine Zidane, and still under the cloud of the Le Pen election result, France were humiliated. It's as if the world community has made a statement through the international language of football: the inclusive France can be champions but this other France has no place.

JONATHAN FREEDLAND
The Guardian

From the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Sir, Your excellent editorials on the euro and the World Cup now need revisiting. All the continental teams that have survived pay their footballers in euros. The Government supports a successful euro as does President Bush, who welcomed the new currency in his speech to the Bundestag last month. Having pro-euro governments seems to pay off for England and the US in the World Cup.

Another factor is that countries which have recently elected right-wing Governments in place of the Centre Left – France, Portugal and Denmark –

have all been eliminated whereas countries whose leaders met to discuss progressive government values, the so-called "Third Way" nations – England, Germany, Brazil and South Korea – have all done well (*continues in this vein for a further paragraph...)*

DENIS MacSHANE MP
Letter to The Times

Today we take an exclusive look at this, the half-way mark, and discover an uncanny resemblance between the Big Brother House and William Golding's classic *Lord of the Flies*.

Channel4.co.uk Big Brother Website

O Praise the Lord with one consent (1717)
The lining of the rectum is, as we all know, covered in sensitive nerve-endings. The thrill of their stimulation resembles the pleasure if Handel's 'Cannons' anthems, in which the Purcellian genre of seventeenth century English church music is clearly discernible, but it is bent double, penetrated from behind by cosmopolitan, Italianate influences. (Italy, popery and vice were then utterly bound in the minds of the English.)

King's College Cambridge May Week Concert programme

He is the master lock-pickers, a player who can, at times, break any law he chooses. Not the laws of the game, but the laws of physics, biomechanics and even at times, the law of gravity. If you seek the beautiful game, you seek Ronaldo.

SIMON BARNES
The Times

Pseuds Corporate

Managers' Master Class: Diversity = Success
5th July 2002
This stimulating event will help you to:
- Understand the drivers of diversity and their impact
- Gain an overview of diversity and emotional intelligence
- Use the Diversity Balance Sheet to apply a cost benefit analysis to your organisation and work
- Identify your own development needs using the diversity competencies

From a circular sent to managers from the Victoria & Albert, Natural History and Science Museums

CONTRIBUTORS: Anthony Gdula, J.A. Doyle, Giles Gordon, Jon Bentley, Professor Andrew Palmer, Strobes, Flora Carew.

£10 paid for all entries

The Führer, The Jackal, The Professor and his Publishers – The Sequel

Sir,

Delighted to be in Private Eye – a lifetime's ambition achieved. Delighted too at the publicity you gave my book 'Telling Lies About Hitler', just published by Verso. However, your reporter, who accuses me of telling porky-pies about the book's prior rejection by other publishers, has been served up a whole trayful of them by his informant.

For starters: my book is not the same as the dossier I compiled for the Irving libel trial; parts of it are based on it, but much is new, including an account of the trial itself. Penguin's decision not to publish it had nothing to do with any disagreement about an advance on royalties The senior management at Penguin decided not to publish anything on the trial beyond Mr Justice Gray's 350-page judgment because it thought it would appear vindictive to do so.

After Heinemann dumped the book, my agent and I approached Granta. They had indeed published another book on the trial, by Don Guttenplan, but there was never any question of Irving suing over it; on the contrary he has often said that he likes it. As soon as he learned that Granta might publish my book as well, however, he repeatedly wrote to them threatening litigation if they did. To their credit, Granta pronounced themselves willing to mount a defence. But they had no doubt that it might cost them a lot of money.

So they offered a four-book deal. I never claimed that they tried to "bully me" into signing it. The deal **was** their idea ("we would like you to become a Granta author"), but on the advice of my agent Peter Robinson I willingly went along with discussion about it. The claim that I suddenly refused to return phone calls later on is ridiculous. If there was any delay in drawing up contracts for the deal it was not due to any lack of action on my part, quite the contrary.

What happened was that on talking to friends and acquaintances in the publishing world about the proposed deal I gradually came to realise that it was not a very good one. The money might have been a lot for Granta but it was not much by current market standards for history. It would tie me up in writing the four books until I reached retirement age. Nobody thought a biography of Karl Marx, one of the four, was a good idea.

When I went to Granta's summer party last year I told Gail Lynch, the MD, and Neil Belton, my editor, of my growing doubts. Neil wildly accused me of being turned against Granta by Orlando Figes, another historian who had recently pulled out a publishing deal with them. While he stormed off to write a furious letter of protest to the unsuspecting and wholly innocent Figes, Gail said she would be sorry if I did not sign the other contracts but she assured me in the strongest terms that Granta were absolutely committed to publishing 'Telling Lies', and 8,000 copies were about to be printed.

On my way out of the party, I ran into the production editor with whom I had completed proof-reading the typeset text and jacket design a couple of weeks before. Imagine my amazement when she told me that Gail had stopped the book from going to the printers. What conclusion was I supposed to draw from this? You can draw your own yourself, no doubt.

The next day I talked to Peter Robinson, my agent. He told me that Granta were very unlikely to publish 'Telling Lies' if I did not sign the other contracts. Why did he think this, I wonder, at the same time as Gail Lynch was assuring me the opposite?

It was at this point that I decided that a fresh mind should be applied to this tangled mess and transferred my representation to Andrew Wylie. It is untrue to say that I did not inform Peter Robinson; on the contrary, I wrote a letter immediately to Peter, to which, in due course, he wrote a reply that made no complaint that he had not been properly informed about the change. And he was right about one thing: when Andrew Wylie told Granta we were not going ahead with the other contracts, they immediately dropped 'Telling Lies'.

Doesn't this all suggest that its publication had in effect always been dependent on my concluding the four-book deal? Who was being dishonest here? All I had done was to change my mind about three contracts I had not even seen, let alone signed. Where is the "double-crossing" on my part? Who had been acting in bad faith? Not me, that's for sure.

Nor did I tell Granta at this point that they still had a "moral obligation" to publish 'Telling Lies'. On the contrary, after we received a long letter from them full of wild allegations, Andrew Wylie and I told them that we wanted to buy back the rights to 'In Defence of History', a book I had published with Granta earlier, since I now no longer wanted to be published by them at all. Granta may have decided, as your column claims, that "we'd had enough of Evans", but they certainly hadn't had enough of 'In Defence of History', which is earning them a tidy and no doubt much-needed profit, because they refused point-blank to accede to our request.

As for the book I'm currently writing, whoever told you that Andrew Wylie negotiated a deal for me with Penguin for almost £1 million(!) is plucking fantasy figures out of thin air.

'Telling Lies' was never written as a money-spinner. The advances I was offered for it in preliminary negotiations with various publishers, including Granta (£5,000), were always modest to non-existent. The point of publishing the book was to bring key issues of the Irving trial before a wider public than had been able to read about them in the very skimpy reporting they got in the press, and to provide a practical vindication of the trial's judgment that it was not illegal to call Irving a Holocaust denier and a falsifier of history.

The point of Nick Cohen's article was to attack this country's biased libel laws, which allow individuals like David Irving to intimidate publishers into silence because they know that if they spend a lot of money defending a defamation action they are unlikely to get much of it back. I would have thought that Private Eye of all publications would have applauded Cohen's stance rather than trying to undermine it.

Yours,
RICHARD J. EVANS,
Prof. of Modern History, Cambridge.

Sir,

Your literary hack's defence of the decision of his mates in the publishing industry to suppress a serious book can't be squared with the facts of the Irving affair. In brief, David Irving was proved to be a neo-Nazi and a fraud in a libel judgement which was as conclusive as the verdict delivered on Jonathan Aitken. Despite having no reputation to lose, Irving can continue to sue with abandon because he is a bankrupt and need never pay costs. Fears of having to pay for a few days in court led Heinemann to drop Professor Evans's account of Irving's manipulations in particular and the twisting of history in general. Granta stepped in and said it would print 'Telling Lies About Hitler'. It received the acclaim of the Guardian, Observer, and all right-thinking liberals with bashful gratitude – then ran away.

You claim that Granta's pulling of the book wasn't motivated by a "terror of Irving and his lawyers". This doesn't stand up, in part because Irving doesn't have lawyers, he represents himself, and in part because Gail Lynch and Neil Belton of Granta wrote in a letter to the Observer that they had "incurred considerable legal expenses, and our libel insurers had increased the excess on our insurance by £10,000 in respect of the book. We were faced with mounting legal bills."

You go on to condemn Evans, and me for writing on his side, because he wouldn't agree to produce fresh books for Granta – and sacked an agent who wanted him to sign a four-book deal rather than look for better advances elsewhere. Obviously, the idea that writers want to get the best price they can for their words shocks you and your fellow voluntary workers at the Eye. I'm afraid I must inform you it is a common desire. You also don't seem to realise that agents and authors have different interests. Agents like four-book agreements, because they get four commissions for one deal. Authors may not be as eager to sign.

In any case, who cares? Granta didn't announce "we'll stand up for freedom of expression but only if the author allows us to screw as much work as we can out of him for as little money as possible?" It said it would print 'Telling Lies About Hitler', then broke its word. Before it was finally published by Verso, Basic and Profile had joined Granta and Heinemann in fleeing from a scholarly study because of the faint threat of libel actions from an old Hitler-worshipper.

On the Eye's good days you worry about the chilling effect of England's repressive libel laws. When you're on top form you check out the pap from corporate PRs before spooning it onto your pages. Come on, you can do better than this.

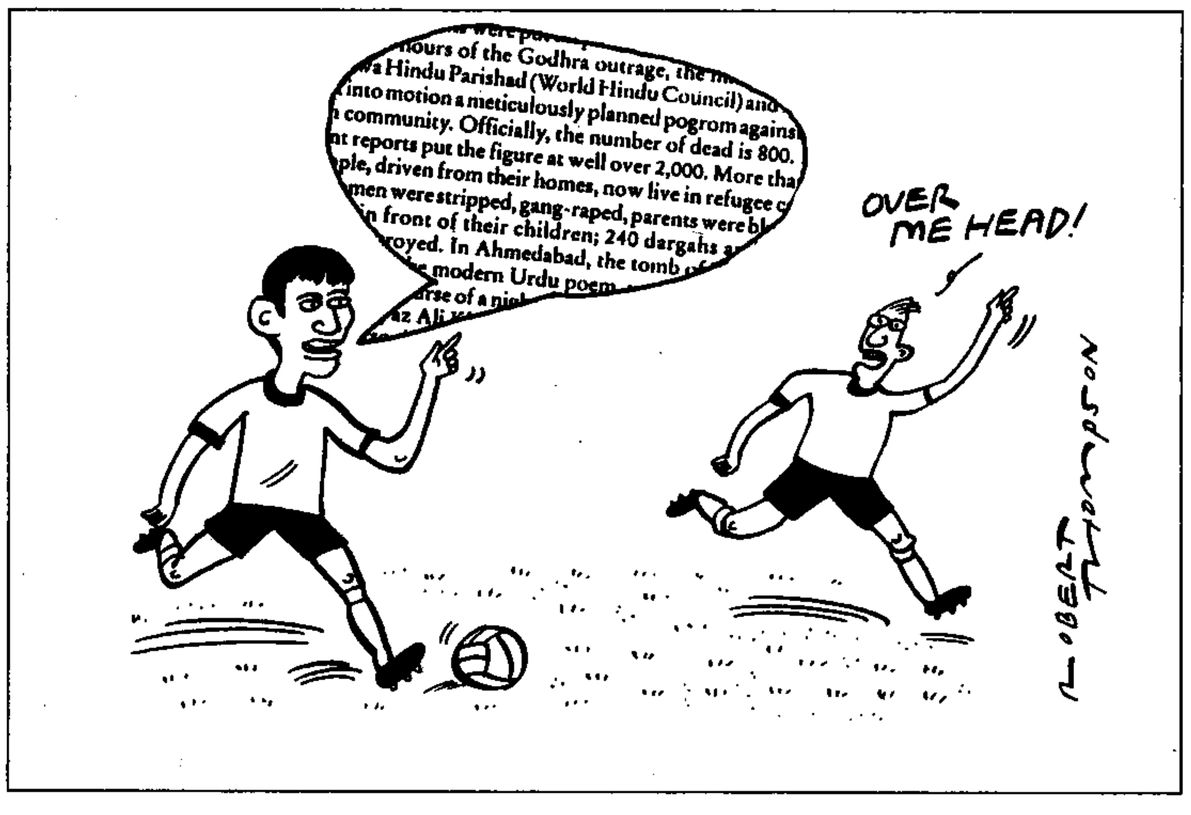
Yours faithfully,
NICK COHEN,
The Observer, London EC1.

A couple of points may need repeating:

The *Eye* has been exposing David Irving's political views and "revisionist" methods since the 1960s. Our piece in the last issue also paid tribute to Richard Evans for demolishing Irving's history of the Holocaust.

Evans-Cohen accuse publishers of cowardice and a fear of losing money. Yet what prompted Evans's breach with Granta was his own desire for *more* money, which led him to sign up with Andrew Wylie and do a multi-book deal with Penguin rather than Granta. Nothing wrong with wanting super-agents and big advances; but do Cohen and Evans really believe that Granta, the jilted suitor, should have reacted to the professor's defection by offering hearty congratulations and obeying his demand that it issue the one book which Penguin refused to take?

Nowhere in our piece did we defend the British libel laws. Granta was not "intimidated into silence" by the threat of libel; it lost patience with Evans on learning that, while stringing Granta along, he had committed himself to a deal with a rival publisher. *Ed.*



IN THE BACK

THANK HAVENS

THE panic in the US over financial scandals is already having an impact on the future of companies, including British ones, who operate from tax havens.

On 18 June the US senate finance committee passed a proposal for a new law to ban shell companies set up in places like Bermuda with the aim of avoiding tax. The proposed bill would treat as corporate exiles any company registered in a tax haven that has "no substantial business" there.

The measure was jointly moved by committee chairman Max Baucus, a Democrat, and Charles Grassley, a Republican. Mr Grassley went so far as to say on the record that the collapse of Enron emphasised the need to "crack down" on corporate offshore activities (Enron had hundreds of subsidiaries in tax havens all over the world).

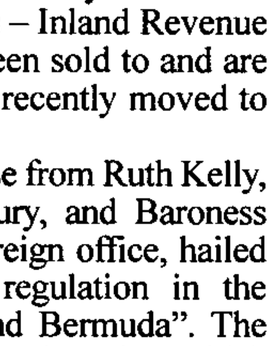
Though the measure passed the committee by only one vote, its chances of being endorsed by the full senate seem good, especially after President George Bush's solemn attack on recent financial scams as "outrageous". Mr Bush of course did not see fit to mention his own dubious dealings on the stock exchange, let alone his friendship and connections with Enron president Ken Lay.

The clamour in the US media against widespread tax avoidance has risen to a crescendo. The *New York Times* and the magazine *Newsweek* regularly denounce firms who set up shop in places like Bermuda as "unpatriotic". Two firms who recently did so are "consultancies" hived off from big accountancy firms – Accenture, once part of Arthur Andersen; and PwC Consulting, once part of PriceWaterhouseCoopers. Safe in their haven, both consultancies are advising their clients on how best to avoid tax.

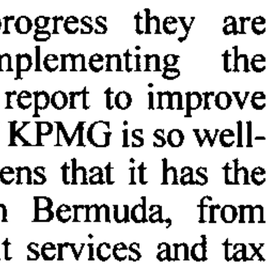
If the senate proposal becomes law, and companies are forced back to their home country, how will the British react? One difficulty here is that the offices of both tax authorities – Inland Revenue and Customs & Excise – have been sold to and are run by a firm, Mapeley, that has recently moved to Bermuda to, er, avoid UK tax.

On 23 May a joint press release from Ruth Kelly, economic secretary to the treasury, and Baroness Amos, minister of state at the foreign office, hailed "further progress on financial regulation in the Caribbean overseas territories and Bermuda". The two women gushed: "We congratulate the British Overseas Territories on the progress they are continuing to make in implementing the recommendations in the KPMG report to improve standards of financial regulation." KPMG is so well-versed in the dangers of tax havens that it has the largest accountancy practice on Bermuda, from which sanctuary it provides audit services and tax advice to tax avoiders all over the world.

PS: The Inland Revenue's house journal *ReveNews*, had a glowing account of the Telephone Open Day reported in the last *Eye*. Many and varied were the reported examples of the free flow of questions to the five Revenue bosses on line, Nick Montagu, chairman; Tim Flesher; Ann Chant (who moved to the Revenue after presiding over the disaster that was the Child Support Agency); Dave Hartnett; and human resources director Alexa Walker. Somehow the line of questioning reported in the *Eye* – namely, why were our buildings flogged off to an international conglomerate of tax avoiders and speculators? – did not feature!



Nick Montagu
(the right spelling)



Ann Chant

CHAN REACTION

IF EVER a case illustrated the desperate need for reform of our antiquated inquest system it is that of Harry Stanley, shot dead in 1999 by two police officers as he walked home from his local pub, carrying nothing more sinister than a table leg in a plastic bag.

Not only did coroner Dr Stephen Chan deny the inquest jury the right to decide whether Stanley had been "unlawfully killed", Chan withheld crucial expert firearms evidence and introduced details of Stanley's long spent convictions. The inquest was, said Nogah Ofer, solicitor for Stanley's widow Irene "a gross sequence of errors" which neither satisfies the family or the public.

Home office forensic reports indicated that 46-year-old Stanley was facing away from the two officers who shot him. This cast grave doubts on both the accounts of Inspector Neil Sharman and PC Kevin Fagan that when challenged, Stanley had grasped one end of the table leg and pointed the other end at Fagan.

Stanley's fatal head wound showed entry on the left side of his head. It was fired by Sharman from behind at an angle of 110 degrees – indicating that Stanley was beginning to turn towards Sharman. Fagan was standing to Sharman's right, putting him even further behind Stanley and out of range of any imagined pointed "weapon".

When challenged by the family's barrister Tim Owen QC as to how their account could possibly square with the pathological and ballistics evidence, they stuck rigidly to their account of events. But for them to be right, said Owen, the entry wound would have had to be on the right side of his head – not the left.

But the inquest jurors were denied any right to give their opinion on this evidence by the coroner, who refused to allow a verdict of unlawful killing. Without giving reasons – as he is obliged to – Dr Chan said that if the jury thought the officers had acted out of self defence then a verdict of lawful killing was appropriate. Almost as an afterthought, he added that an open verdict – with no specific finding and no blame – was available if there was not enough evidence to satisfy them about "the other suggested verdict". The jury opted unanimously for the open verdict – a clear indication that they rejected the explanation of self-defence.

Finally, at the end of the evidence and with no warning or explanation, Chan allowed details of Stanley's previous (and long spent) convictions to be given. Once again, when challenged by Owen for the family, Chan refused to explain why the previous convictions were relevant to any issue the jury had to decide.

Now Chan has a record of attracting criticism but even if handled differently the limitations imposed on inquests mean they are ill-equipped to decide the small but very significant numbers of controversial deaths, where the state or big business may be to blame. They are restricted to answering only four questions: Who, When, Where and How? They have no remit to ask the crucial question that families in disasters, workplace deaths or deaths in custody want answered: Why?

Inquests are not allowed to make any findings of civil liability, and neither are they allowed to find criminal liability against named individuals. If the state, a company or an individual is to blame for a death, the public – and indeed victim's families – want an inquest verdict that reflects that fault. Verdicts of "accident" or "suicide" are inadequate if they could have been avoided but for the negligence of others. But even bringing in a rider suggesting a death was contributed to by neglect is notoriously difficult unless the neglect was a "gross" failure and unless it can be proved that there was a failure by the system – not as is often the case, by individuals.

Added to this is the problem of imbalance since the police, prison officers, and the home office have state-funded barristers at inquests to represent them while families may only qualify for a limited form of special funding occasionally granted by the lord chancellor's department. And the families are only allowed access to the evidence which the coroner decides is relevant.

The inadequacies of this current system have (after years of tireless campaigning by human rights lawyers and groups such as Inquest) finally been recognised by the government, which set up a review team to look at reform a year ago. However, it has yet to issue even a consultation document

FOLLOW-UP... FOLLOW-UP FOLLOW-UP... FOLLOW-UP

■ **FOOT AND MOUTH:** Defra has announced that it will return to its native state acres of grassland on Ashmoor, at Meeth in Devon, which it ripped up 14 months ago to provide a never-to-be-used carcass disposal site. Cost to taxpayers so far? Well over £7m and rising at £10,000 a week for security at the site.

In April last year work started on 16 football pitch-sized pits to take some half a million dead animals. A water storage lagoon, plant compound, roads, unloading bay, floodlighting and security fences were built. Three pits were excavated and lined and a fourth dug out. Perhaps due to spring water suddenly seeping under the lining, no more were dug.

It has taken until now to decide the pits are useless under revised FMD contingency plans. Though planning permission wasn't needed to build them, Defra is consulting planners about restoration, so the taxpayers' meter is still running.

■ **ASBESTOS:** Adding insult to injury for the hundreds of asbestos victims of the former UK multinational Turner and Newell (T and N), who have seen their damages claims thwarted by clever use of American bankruptcy laws, comes news of the costs of those bankruptcy "restructuring" proceedings: US$50.6m and rising... more than enough to compensate many ill and dying victims.

The figures are revealed in the annual report of US giant Federal Mogul, which bought out T and N and which, to borrow the words of John Battle MP, "has contrived to get out of its asbestos liabilities by declaring the asbestos parts of the company bankrupt, while the rest of the company sails on picking up millions of pounds worth of contracts".

How much of those legal and administrative costs have been spent on T and N operations and how much on other Federal Mogul subsidiaries, which have also been put into liquidation because of the asbestos, is not known. But victims from the US, UK, France and Swaziland will now have to compete as "creditors" for a share of whatever pot is left after lawyers and accountants have taken their winding-up fees.

■ **POLICE LAWYERS:** One surprising winner at this year's legal awards sponsored by the *Lawyer* magazine was Russell Jones & Walker, a firm well known to *Eye* readers for its work on behalf of disgruntled police officers.

The firm got the cherished Employment Team of the Year award on 25 June – just days before judgment in the professional negligence case of Credit Lyonnais v Russell Jones & Walker was announced by Mr Justice Laddie on 2 July.

He found against Russell Jones & Walker who, he said, had "failed in its duty to its client". The firm had adopted the unusual employment practice of allocating a relatively simple property case not to a property lawyer but to a corporate one. The result was disaster; but Credit Lyonnais was able to recoup its losses by suing its award-winning solicitors.

■ **SALMON STAKES:** "Naturally occurring" toxic algal blooms are back, and three chunks of Hebridean waters, covering hundreds of square miles, have been shut to scallop fishing because of high levels of amnesic shellfish poisoning. Dr Kenny Black, from the Scottish Executive's marine laboratory in Argyll, says it's nothing to do with fish farm excrement. So that's all right, then...

In the Back continues overleaf

HEATON LIGHT

W.S. ATKINS is a firm with many interests in many fields, including mobile phones. Through its subsidiary, W.S. Atkins Mobile Communications, it is deeply involved in the controversial TETRA scheme foisted on the police by the home office in the days when Jack Straw was in charge there.

The scheme is run by 0_2, formerly part of British Telecom. Planning applications have been filed all over the country by Atkins on 0_2's behalf for masts from which TETRA will operate. The masts have led to considerable concern in some areas about health hazards from radiation.

Fortunately there is an independent body, financed in part by the department of health, that monitors such risks and reports accordingly: the National Radiological Protection Board. Last year the NRBP received a report on TETRA from its advisory group on non-ionising radiation, chaired by Sir Richard Doll. The report's executive summary stated that most of the danger of radiation from the system will arise in the course of the work of the people using the portable handsets: namely the police.

It went on: "Little work has been published on the assessment of SAR (specific energy absorption rate) in the head from TETRA hand portables under simulated conditions of use. The results of very limited experimental work known to the advisory group suggest that when the present generation of hand portables are operating at full power, the exposure of the head will be below the guidelines on exposure limits."

Frances Heaton

Less was comforting was the report's further observation that, depending on future developments in the TETRA system, radiation absorption could rise considerably. "Careful thought needs to be given to the design and conditions of use of any future systems with respect to ensuring compliance with exposure guidelines," it said.

A spokeswoman for the NRPB told the *Eye* that this report was not even discussed when it came to the full board in March last year; nor when it was published in July; nor when it was amended last November. "This was a scientific committee," she said. "Its report was accepted, but not discussed by the board." So there was no need for any special declaration of interest from the members of the board, not even from Mrs Frances Heaton, a "new" Labour appointment to the board and a member of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. She declares on the board's website that she is "deputy chairman of W.S. Atkins".

GREAT BARRIER GRIEF

AS YET another vehicle crashes off a road on to a railway line, an old and awkward question reemerges: who is to pay the bill for last year's Great Heck disaster in which 10 people died?

Gary Hart, whose Land Rover crashed on to a busy track, has already been jailed for years and his insurers are apparently liable for the full cost of the disaster. But what about the government and its Highways Agency, which is responsible for the safety of motorways such as the one Gary Hart was driving along when his vehicle plunged on to the busy railway line?

Among the many interesting letters received by Gary Hart and his family since the crash is a detailed analysis from Tom Conway BSc, CPhys, MInstP, who is retired and living in Anglesey, and spent nearly 30 years working in the power industry on many matters, including health and safety.

Mr Conway was intrigued and shocked by the story of the Great Heck disaster, and wrote to Mr Hart's family in February expressing the view that Hart was "stitched up and made to carry the blame for the Selby rail crash"; and that, in his opinion, the real and sole responsibility for the crash rested with the Highways Agency.

Gary Hart

In a detailed report Mr Conway points out that it is the statutory responsibility of all employers, including those responsible for roads, to carry out "risk assessments" in any area where employees or members of the public may be in danger, and to act accordingly. The requirement to carry out such assessments is plainly stated in the health and safety legislation and on the website of the health and safety executive (HSE). Did the Highways Agency carry out a risk assessment on the stretch of motorway from which Gary Hart's vehicle crashed? If not, says Mr Conway, it was grossly negligent. If it did, what was the result of the assessment and what was done about it?

The *Eye* put these questions to the Highways Agency, whose spokesman's reply was the same as it was last year: namely that a team from the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) had gone to Great Heck soon after the crash and had concluded that the safety arrangements there met the necessary British standard.

Yes, but what about the risk assessment? The spokesman explained that the agency employs companies to carry out the necessary assessments and do the work resulting from them. The relevant companies in this case, he disclosed, were WSP and Carillion, formerly Tarmac. The *Eye* contacted these companies, to be told that any inquiries had to be made to, er, the Highways Agency. The reply from there was the same as before: namely that all the necessary statutory requirements had been met.

The Highways Agency then sent the *Eye* the full report from the Transport Research Laboratory, successors to the Road Research Laboratory that had, as long ago as 1985, expressed concerns about the danger to the railway from embankments such as the one at Great Heck (see *Eye* 1044). The current report, signed soon after the accident in March last year by Adrian Runacres and Malcolm Macdonald of TRL, does indeed appear to clear the agency. It states:

"The material safety fence appears to comply with standards in regard to its length." But the report goes on: "In order for the whole of the Land Rover to have engaged with the full height safety fence, the length of full height safety fencing present at the material location would have needed to have been in excess of twice its current length. It should be noted that the material vehicle combination (a Land Rover towing a double axle trailer unit carrying a Renault Savanna estate car) is outside of the vehicle specification for this type of safety fence. Therefore, we cannot be certain at this point of our investigations that the safety fence would have restrained the vehicle, even if it had fully engaged with it."

There then follows the rather crucial qualification: "Notwithstanding the above, our preliminary opinion is that any engagement between Land Rover and safety fence would have been likely to prevent the vehicle reaching the railway line." Two facts emerge from this report, which is used by the Highways Agency to duck its responsibility for the disaster: 1. To protect the railway even from Land Rovers, let alone lorries, the fence should have been twice its current length. 2. If there had been a longer fence there, the disaster would never have happened.

The relevant sums are, approximately, lengthening the safety fence, £18,000. Cost of the accident (two trains, ten dead and many more injuries) £1.4bn.

HAIL, KAISER!

WHILE health ministers inside the House of Commons continue to accuse the Tories of intending to privatise the NHS, outside the Commons they themselves are showing increasing signs of sympathy with moves to, er, privatise the NHS.

In *Eye* 1056 we referred to a paper in the *British Medical Journal* by American doctors pointing out the advantages of Kaiser Permanente, a huge private health organisation in California with keen ambitions to expand in the UK.

On 20 June the annual lecture of the Office of Health Economics, financed entirely by the drugs industry, was delivered in the prestigious headquarters of the Royal College of Physicians. The speaker was David Lawrence, departing chief executive of Kaiser Permanente. He outlined the tremendous advantages of providing health care the Kaiser way, without making any effort to deal with the chief objection: that as a private organisation financed by private insurance, Kaiser cannot and does not provide health care for the poorest 20 percent of California's population.

The NHS, on the other hand, does not exclude anyone on grounds of income or wealth. The *Eye*'s many spies at the lecture, which was packed with representatives of the drug companies (though the health department was conspicuous by its absence), describe Dr Lawrence's performance as "long on charm, short on facts".

Almost simultaneously, and naturally by coincidence, the authors of the original pro-Kaiser paper in the *BMJ* have replied in that journal to the loud and almost universal criticism of it from defenders of the NHS. Somehow, rather like Dr Lawrence, the reply fails to deal with the main and obvious criticism that Kaiser does not provide health care for the poorest (and therefore usually the sickest) fifth of the population.

In his speech Lawrence referred several times to his cooperation with and admiration for "Don" – believed to be a reference to Don Berwick, a keen American medical privatiser who has just been appointed by the government to the National Health Service modernisation board.

Meanwhile more news about Kaiser comes to the *Eye* from the *Los Angeles Times* whose 17 May issue carried the curious headline: KAISER CLERKS PAID MORE FOR HELPING LESS. The paper revealed that in 2000 and 2001, call centre clerks working for Kaiser could earn bonuses of up to 10 percent of their salaries if they spent less than three minutes 45 seconds on the phone per patient.

The call centres were available to Kaiser's three million members in Northern California. The bonus system was denounced by the California Nurses Association, representing Kaiser's registered nurses. They complained that the call centre system allowed unlicensed telephone clerks to make decisions about scheduling appointments or referring patients to medical advice nurses. The association claimed such a task was restricted by state law to "licensed medical personnel". The newspaper also quotes a doctor at one of the call centres describing the system as "a barrier between patients and their clinical providers".

While a substantial section of the medical establishment sucks up to Kaiser, there are increasing signs of the close relationship between the government, the Labour party and the private health and drugs industries. On 27 May, for instance, health minister Lord Hunt, a champion of PFI in the health service, opened the spanking new High Wycombe Centre for the drugs company Pharmacia; and the Fabian Society, a constituent part of the Labour party, whose founders proclaimed the advantages of public ownership, is running a monthly lecture (plus the usual buffet lunch) as part of its Health Policy Forum, proudly inaugurated last October by health secretary Alan Milburn.

The forum is in association with (and mostly paid for by) the enormous French drugs company Aventis, whose annual turnover is $18bn.

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

AS PART of its wish to be seen as more pro-business than the Conservatives, "new" Labour is eager to remove the stigma of bankruptcy from thrusting, would-be entrepreneurs. Trade ministers like to quote American examples of bankruptcy being a mere blip on the road to commercial success – and therefore not to be used to handicap another potential Bill Gates.

While some bankrupts are the unlucky victims of circumstances beyond their control, others are very much the architects of their own downfall. As such, bankruptcy is a word to the wise when they reemerge in the world of business.

Which brings us to one-time schoolboy financial whiz-kid Aidan Earley, who blazed a path across the City before flaming out and crashing to earth but who has now returned as a major shareholder in two listed companies and with a website geared to potential investors.

"Oh God, I've been summoned to see my bank manager – now what does he want to sell me?"

Earley attracted considerable attention when, fresh from public school, he established an investment company in the heady days before the market crash of 1987. Earley Enterprises and Allied Equity were based in north Humberside where the precocious Aidan lived with his four brothers. Young Master Aidan was soon claiming a "golden touch" which enabled him to make a series of stock market killings as he traded £200m. So much so that by 1988 he was declaring that he was already a millionaire at 21. Many individuals and some City institutions believed the hype and became clients or backers of Earley. Earley Enterprises was said at one time to offer returns of up to 44 percent.

However, before 1989 it had ended in creditors' tears. Despite confident predictions when problems first surfaced in October 1988, within a month Earley Enterprises went bust with debts of more than £3m and the Porsche-driving, smart-suited young Master Aidan was made bankrupt with personal debts of £1m.

Earley was let down by his supposed "golden touch" when it convinced him to take a £2m-plus gamble on Micro Business Systems, a then hot stock. MBS produced poor results, the shares plummeted and Aidan Earley was out of business.

Creditors of Earley Enterprises were told by liquidator Michael Hore: "Here we have a very young man full of confidence in his own ability who has paid the penalty for getting involved too deeply in share-dealing when perhaps he should have taken more advice than he did. People thought it was the case that he was a financial whiz-kid, but we have no accounts so we cannot say whether he had traded profitably or not."

Earley Enterprises had debts of £3.5m and its assets realised only £426,000. Portfolio manager Allied Equity owed its clients £400,000. They received £270,000 in compensation from the Securities & Investment Board.

Aidan Earley was made bankrupt in April 1989. The bankruptcy was automatically discharged in 1992 so he could once again be a company director. It wasn't long before he was back in business, but once more the performance failed to justify the promises.

In 1994 Earley became a director of European & General plc which was advising and financing small companies. E&G was wound up by its creditors in 1995 with no worthwhile assets. The collapse was blamed on "poor investment decisions".

Nevertheless Earley, now based in Wimbledon, and his associates continued to attract investors for new ventures such as Cavenham plc – a name made famous by another stock market gambler, the late and unlamented Jimmy Goldsmith. (No doubt by coincidence the proposed chairman of Earley Enterprises, according to its website, is a former Goldsmith banker.) Cavenham was wound up by the VAT men of the Customs & Excise in 1997 after Earley resigned. This was soon followed by the Customs winding up BHE Management of which Earley had also been a director. Prior to these failures Earley had been a director of Forbes Calendars where he resigned just weeks before the company was wound up in 1996. Several other companies of which Earley was a director during the mid-90s were subsequently dissolved.

But by 1999 Aidan Earley was ready to try again with a new Earley Enterprises which began trading the following year as an industrial and investment group. Since then Earley Enterprises has acquired stakes in the down at heel Lotus shoe makers FII Group and in a recent AIM reflotation, Bidtimes. So far, the new Earley Enterprises has produced no accounts for its activities.

Earley has 1.5m shares in FII which so far this year have fallen from 15p to 8p. Hardly surprising as the company has suffered huge losses. Initially the stake was half the size and held in the name of Karen Earley. The prospects for the now 6.5 percent stake do not look promising.

Bidtimes has been an even worse performer. Its shares have fallen from 17p to 5p. Earley Enterprises has acquired 845,000 shares or 16.5 percent through its Lanman Asset Management. Bidtimes' main asset is a stake in the listed SRS Technology which provides environmental control systems for the disabled. Its shares have fallen from 125p to 76p since joining AIM last year.

None of this means that the second coming of Aidan Earley and Earley Enterprises is going to end like the first, but investors would do well to keep the past in mind when evaluating the future.

As Earley himself says on his website referring to his "bitter experience" and "appreciation of his own areas of weakness": "If things can go wrong they generally will so he fully appreciates the need to pay more attention to the downside than to be overcome by a blind excitement of the upside."

AND still they flood cyberspace – the email tsunami offering instant wealth in return for facilitating the crime of corruption or theft in some part of Africa south of the Sahara.

The "419" pandemic, Nigeria's major fraud export, is undeterred by prosecutions. The Serious Farce Office recently had two Nigerian "419" conmen jailed, who in four years had taken £500,000 from the greedy and the stupid in Britain, Europe and the US. The UK mugs lost on average £30,000 each. George Agbinone and Ovie Ukueku pretended to be the corrupt Dr Rabiu from Nigeria's Foreign Payments Bureau, who had millions to pay to those prepared to lend their bank accounts for the receipt of stolen government funds supposedly from over-invoiced contracts.

The "419" conmen are also undeterred by warnings from law enforcement agencies or institutions such as the European Commission which recently circulated staff warning Eurocrats not to be tempted by the email millions on offer.

But then why should those behind this long running scam, which began with telex, moved to letters and then exploded thanks to email, be deterred? Exploiting greed is easy – one recent e-mail was sent simultaneously to a list of addressees which ran to four A4 pages – and the returns lucrative.

The latest batch of new wrinkles, provided by *Eye* readers on that old but over-used favourite, corrupt Nigerian civil servants, show just how the scam is being adapted to dupe those who believe the "419" con only operates from Nigeria.

New entrants include two supposed members of the opposition MDC party in Zimbabwe looking to liberate more than $20m held in South Africa or the Netherlands. Then there is the son of a black farmer poisoned by Mugabe supporters who had come by $25m also waiting in South Africa.

It seems that South Africa, from where many of the Nigerian conmen operate to avoid the Nigeria connection, is also spawning corrupt officials, particularly from the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources who say they are sitting on up to $30m. Other countries entering the race to empty gullible bank accounts include oil rich Gabon and Angola, as well as impoverished Niger and Burkina Faso, plus money looted from Liberia by Nigerian troops and money held in Ghana.

Then there are the grieving relatives of former Angolan rebel leader Jonas Savimbi – his widow Sandra has $25m in a Dutch security firm. Or the wife and sons of ex-Zaire dictator Mobutu. The

● ***Slicker continues overleaf...***

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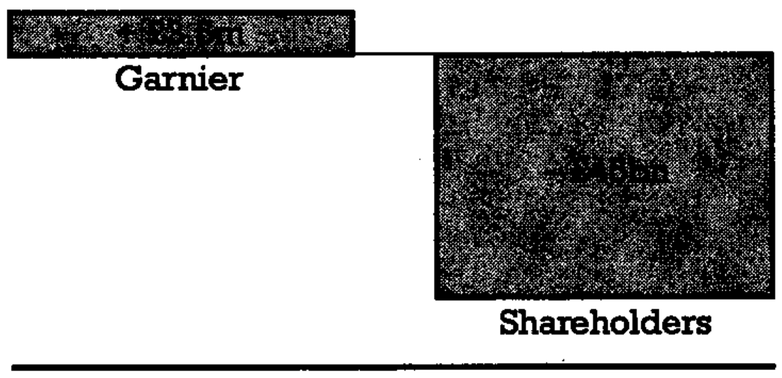
Glaxo chief executive Jean-Pierre Garnier

One year's profit and loss at **GlaxoSmithKline** for...



sons are looking to liberate $22m from Nigeria, but the widow Mariam seems rather confused as to whether she has $30m or $18m and which of her sons (Benson, Johnson, Michael, Kennedy or the appropriately named Basher) investors are to work with to receive their millions in return for a little humanitarian aid.

But the prize for innovation must go to Dennis Longe, a "Special Forces commando" working for the coalition forces in Afghanistan who has stumbled over $36m in Taliban/Al-Qaeda drug money which is now sitting in a luggage office in Kabul. Because of "military ethics" Dennis can't move the money out and would like some help!

MORE on that curious transaction whereby former Tory treasurer Michael Ashcroft sold his Boca Raton home to his wife for $100 so that she could sell it the same day to a senior executive of Tyco International, which had just bought Ashcroft's ADT, for $2.5m.

It emerges that Ashcroft had bought the Florida home seven years earlier in 1990 for $2.3m so did he claim a capital gains tax loss on his generous gift? And what about tax on the $2.5m profit made by his wife? Probably not an issue in the UK or Belize, but what about the US? And had the house – which then was used by Tyco chairman and Ashcroft bid benefactor Dennis Kozlowski – really risen in value only by $200,000 in seven years?

'Slicker'

JUST FANCY THAT!

INVESTORS are growing into a pretty unshockable lot these days. The WorldCom scandal barely caused a flutter among private or institutional investors yesterday.

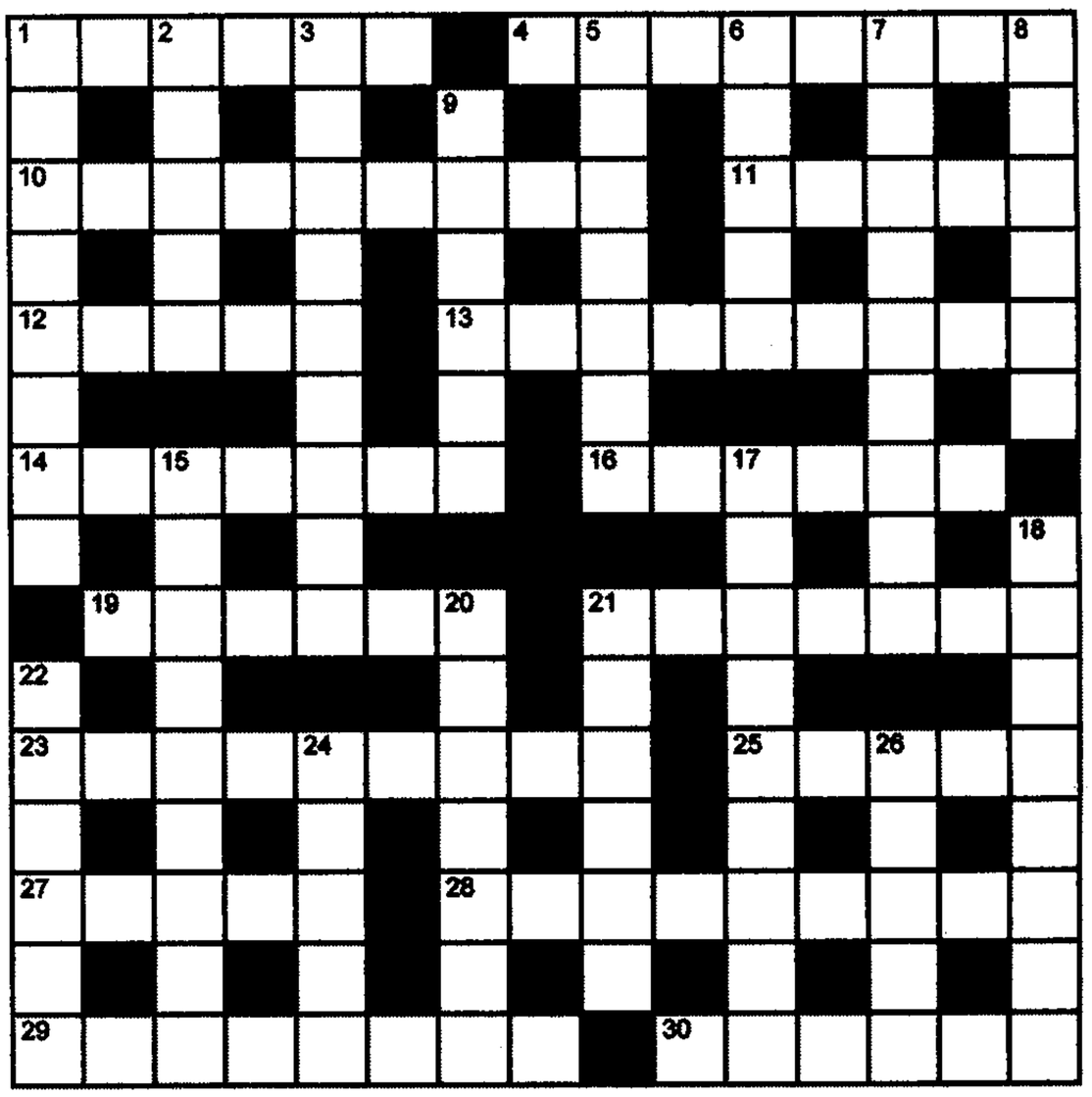
Daily Telegraph, p.31, June 27

CONFIDENCE in the Square Mile cracked yesterday as another skeleton rattled out of corporate America's closet.

Daily Telegraph, p. 35, June 27

EYE CROSSWORD 213

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 19 July 2002.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

1 Hard, non-blue Blair party shock style (6)
4 Straw's success? — sod all! (4,4)
10/28 Losing control and launching a dull Alastair Campbell-style spiel? (5,4,1,4,4)
11 Settle back, chat and instigate an erection (3,2)
12 Old Frenchman: "No getting off with this girl" (5)
13 Brain Sting (stupid twat) (5,4)
14 Synthetic fibre shag pile initially as well inside (7)
16 Arranged coupling with Price overhead (6)
19 Roger needs ball bearing exactly right (4,2)
21 Couple of charlies in poor taste (4,3)
23 Pissed, having had first aid treatment? (9)
25 Cut-back in key hospital that's overwhelmed (5)
27 Nancy boy centrally penetrates star queer (5)
28 See 10
29/1dn. Brenda possibly gives foreign bloke constant, long-absent, ecstatic head (3,5,8)
30 Rips off southern boat people (6)

DOWN

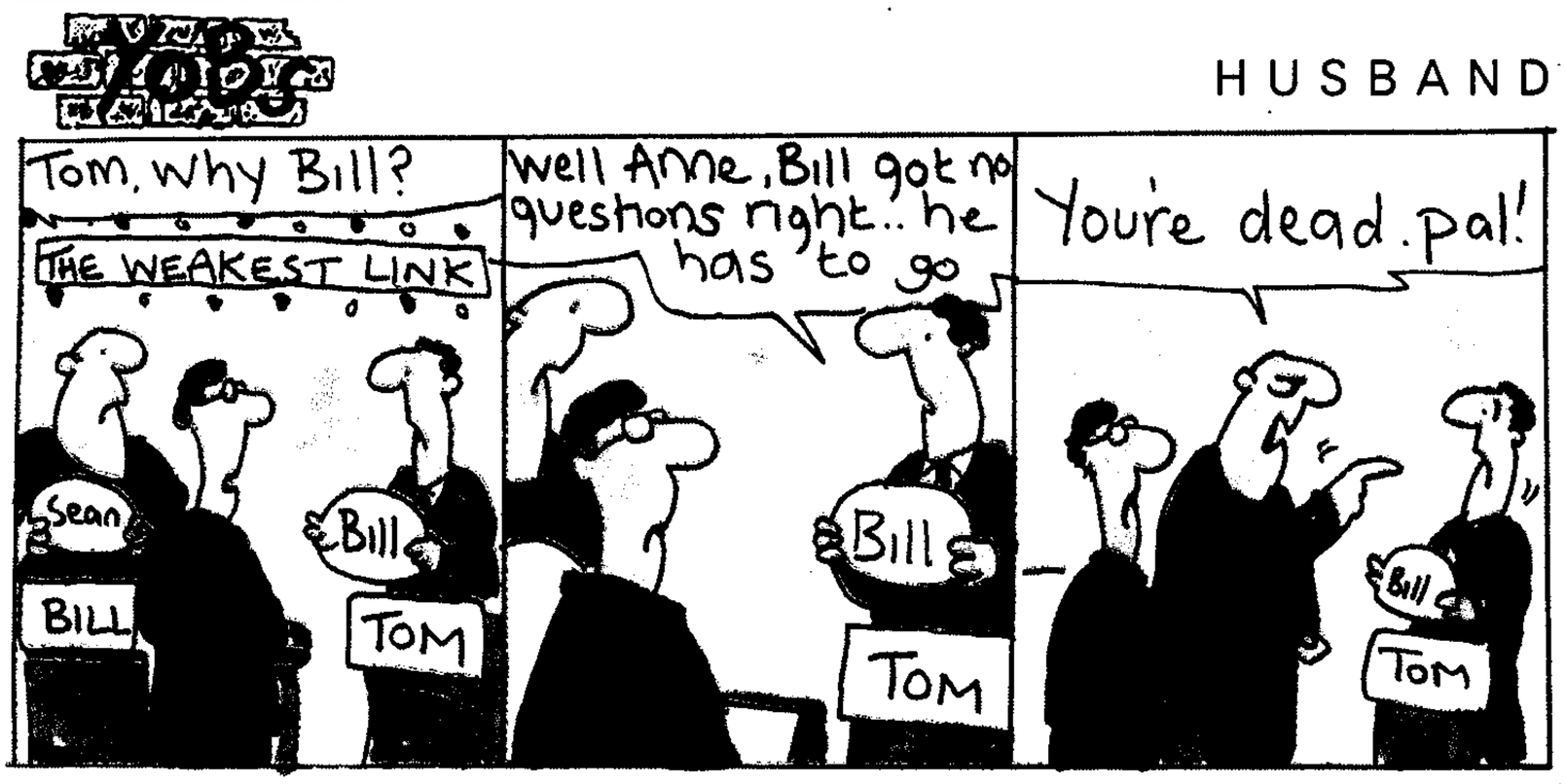
1 See 29 Across
2 Big firm topless female is comparatively frigid (5)
3 When boxer has to take a bite of another boxer that really is competitive! (3-3-3)
5 Green party topped by one endlessly outspoken (7)
6 Finished Kay with a lay (5)
7 Tory messed around with sheep — "wizard ejaculation!" (3,6)
8 Was first to stick magazine up Prince's inside (6)
9 Student-knocking non-discriminatory gender-wise? (6)
15 Smooth white chap has one breast removed (9)
17 Like an orgasm is to do with temperature, etc. on catching cold (9)
18 Shag if an outcast produces foreign money (8)
20 Bliss when Irish singer throttled by northern terrorists (7)
21 Parking cheat fellow goes for piss (6)
22 Holding pint, piss and get it all over the place (6)
24 Balls-up very incomplete body (5)
26 Try out topless Liberal (5)

Crossword 212 winner: LINDA ROSEN

Solution to Crossword 212

ACROSS: 1 Blow job 5 Bedewed 9 Creep 10 Nail-biter 11/16 A fart in a spacesuit 12 Ockham 14 Edgar 18 The squits 20 Voter 21 Cabbie 22 Tanked up 25 Seat-stick 26 Never 27 Endings 28 Easy lay.

DOWN: 1 Bucharest 2 Opera 3 Jupiter 4 Banana skin 5 Blip 6 Debacle 7 Witch-hunt 8 Durum 13 Ramshackle 15 Greybeard 17 Tory Party 19 Quids in 20 Vikings 21 Caste 23 Devil 24 Piss.



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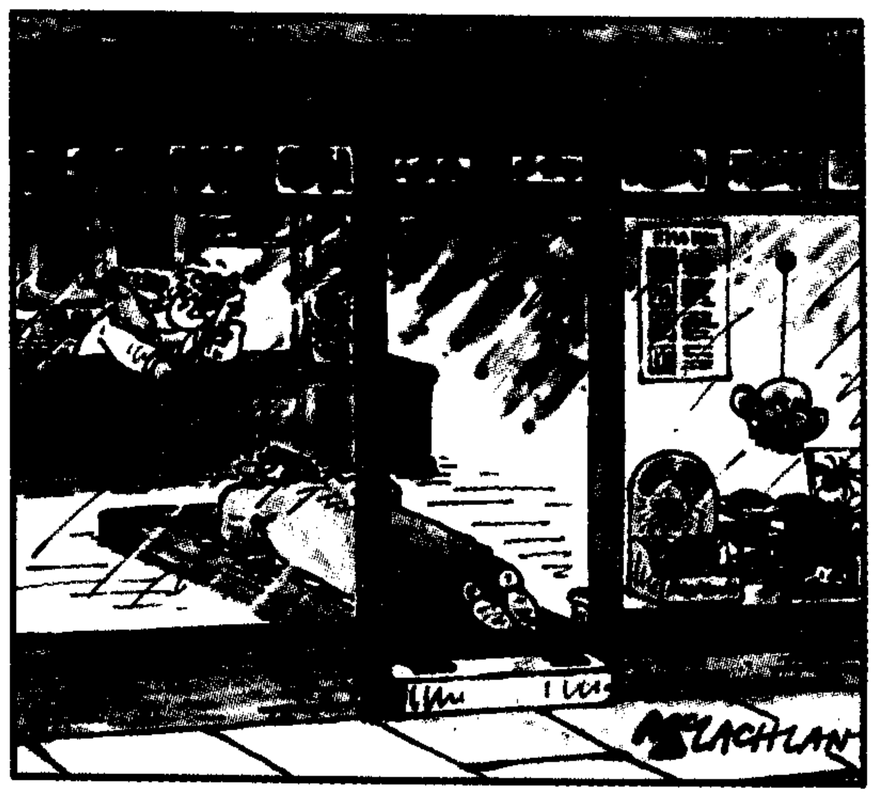

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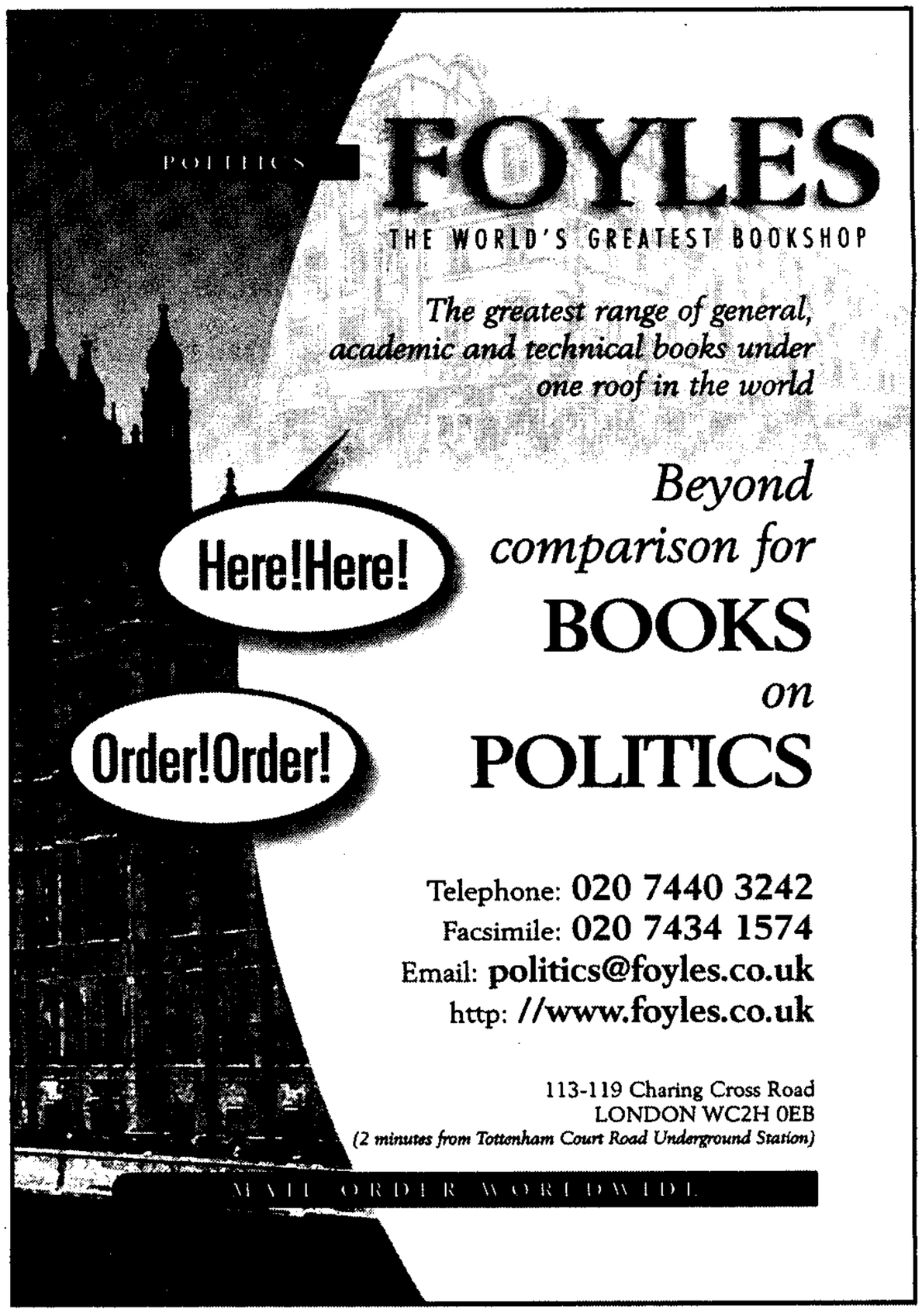
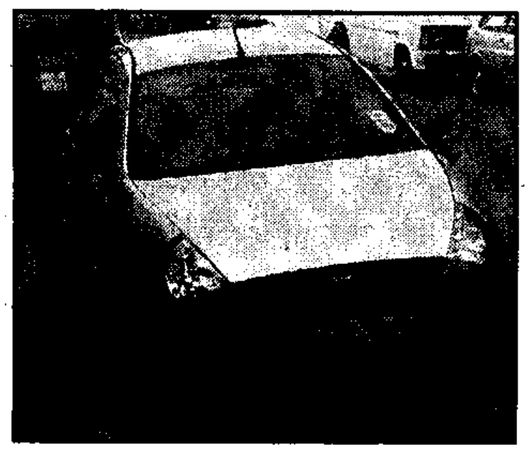
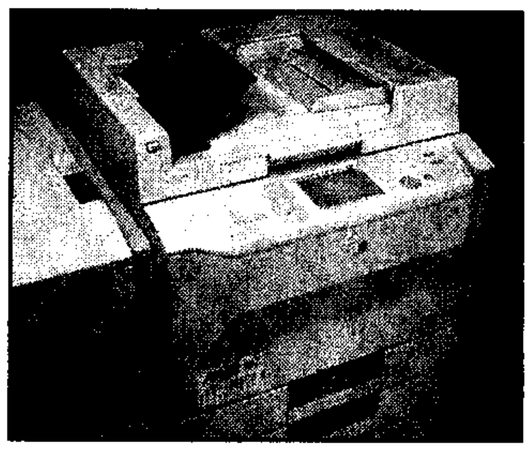




Ford Ka 1.3i. R reg in excellent condition. Bankruptcy. Auction price **£1,900.**



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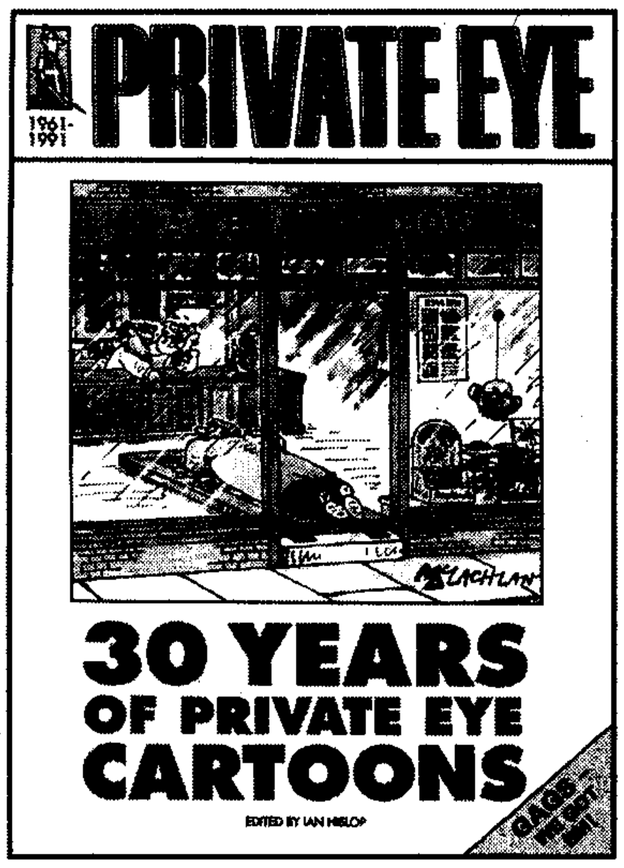

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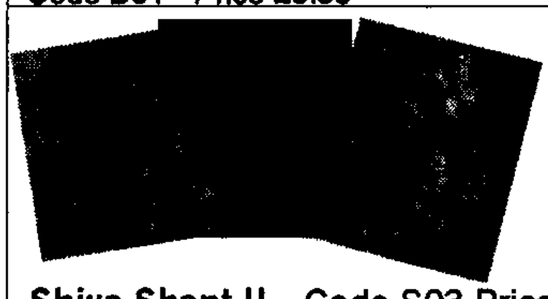

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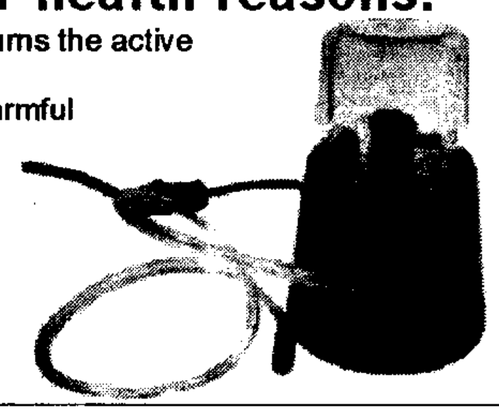

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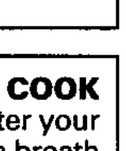

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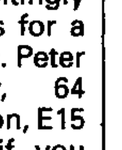

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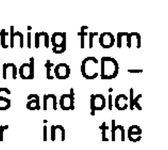

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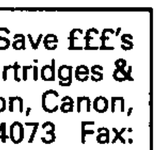

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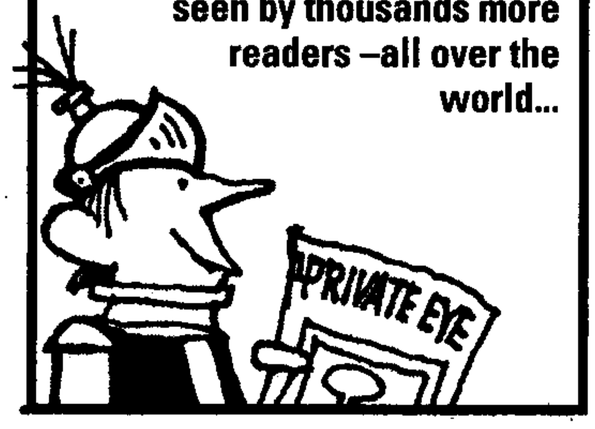

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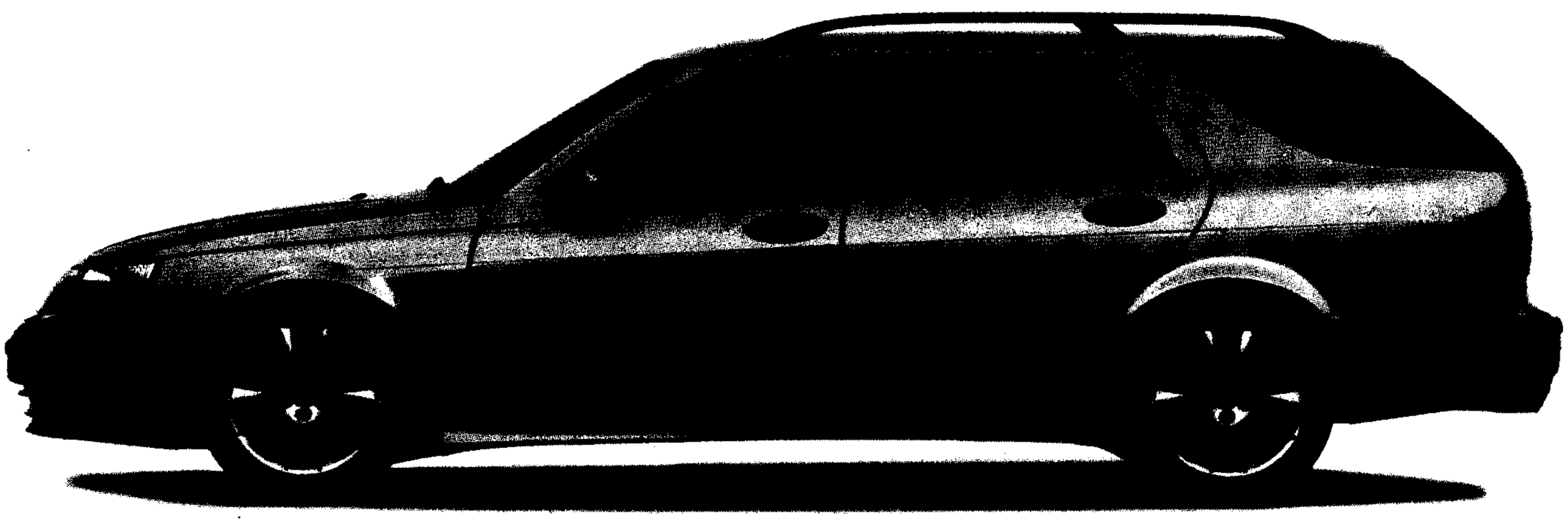

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